Coming to the Collaboratory

Seven True Stories From The State Department

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Published in 2016 by

Collaboratory

U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Photography by Brian H Neely for the U.S. Department of State.

Paperback ISBN: 9781367392175

Dedicated to the Empty Chair:

To holding space for the perspective of those not in the room, including program participants, past partners, and partners still to come, including—we hope—you.

Contents

vii
Foreword
Evan Ryan

xi
Introduction
Roxanne Cabral

1
Pods and Paracosms
Amy Storrow

13
From Immigrant to Pioneer
Patricia Joo

27
Honoring Awkward
Jennryn Wetzler

104
About the Contributors

107
Colophon

37
The Things You Learn From Beauty Queens
A. Sunshine Ison

53
Leading as a Contractor
Katie Leasor

69
The Design Necessity
Hannah Koenig

87
Breathing Together
Paul Kruchoski

Foreword

Evan Ryan
Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs

I recently read about Sunita Williams, an astronaut who has spent a total of 322 days in space so far. She holds the record for total cumulative spacewalk time (50 hours and 40 minutes) for a female astronaut. You'd think she's the sort who started carefully planning her career when she was five.

In fact, she wanted to be a veterinarian, but she didn't get into the schools that were her first choice. Her brother told her that the cadets at the U.S. Naval Academy really like camping, and so did she, so she went there. That led to a stint as a helicopter pilot, and then she moved to NASA.

I mention this story because it reminds me that we often overlook the place of serendipity and even randomness in our lives, especially our professional lives. *Coming to the Collaboratory* is, at its heart, a book about the great benefit of embracing serendipity.

I first heard the word "collaboratory" when I happened to ride in the elevator with Amy Storrow, the first Director, who had come to the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau (ECA) a few months before my arrival. She said she'd stumbled across the word on the Stanford website. After she did a little research and realized that the NIH and the Air Force also had collaboratories, she thought it was a perfect way to capture the work that this new unit would do within our bureau, with the rest of the Department and the interagency, and with the tech community. In short, a collaboratory builds networks and communities in a collaborative way, often (though not always) by incorporating technology. Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Rick Ruth also liked the element of mystery the word held—it was not what you'd expect from the State Department.

This is not to say that we should do away with thinking strategically and just let things happen, of course. Strategy and serendipity go hand in hand. A good strategy has flexibility built into it, and serendipity offers opportunities to make the most of that flexibility. An open mindset helps you see where—and how very often—the two intersect.

The creativity of the Collaboratory speaks for itself. What interests me is how they've embraced creativity not only in their programs but in how they run their operations and even how they reinvent the use of space. Their studio began as a dismal cube warren; now it's a cheerful spot modeled on an American den, the kind of place where you want to be invited for coffee for a real conversation. Their area of the fifth floor is festooned with Post-it notes that shift and recombine and sprout. Walking through it is like being in a butterfly garden of multicolored possibility.

There's a lesson in the Collaboratory for all of us. Within the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau, there is tremendous untapped creativity. I see it. What I'd like for everyone who works here to understand is that you have my permission and my blessing to run with it. Experiment. Play. Try new things. Have fun. Learn. Your job is to help people connect, and what job is more important? Always, shoot for the stars.

Stars, Comrie, Scotland

Introduction

Roxanne Cabral

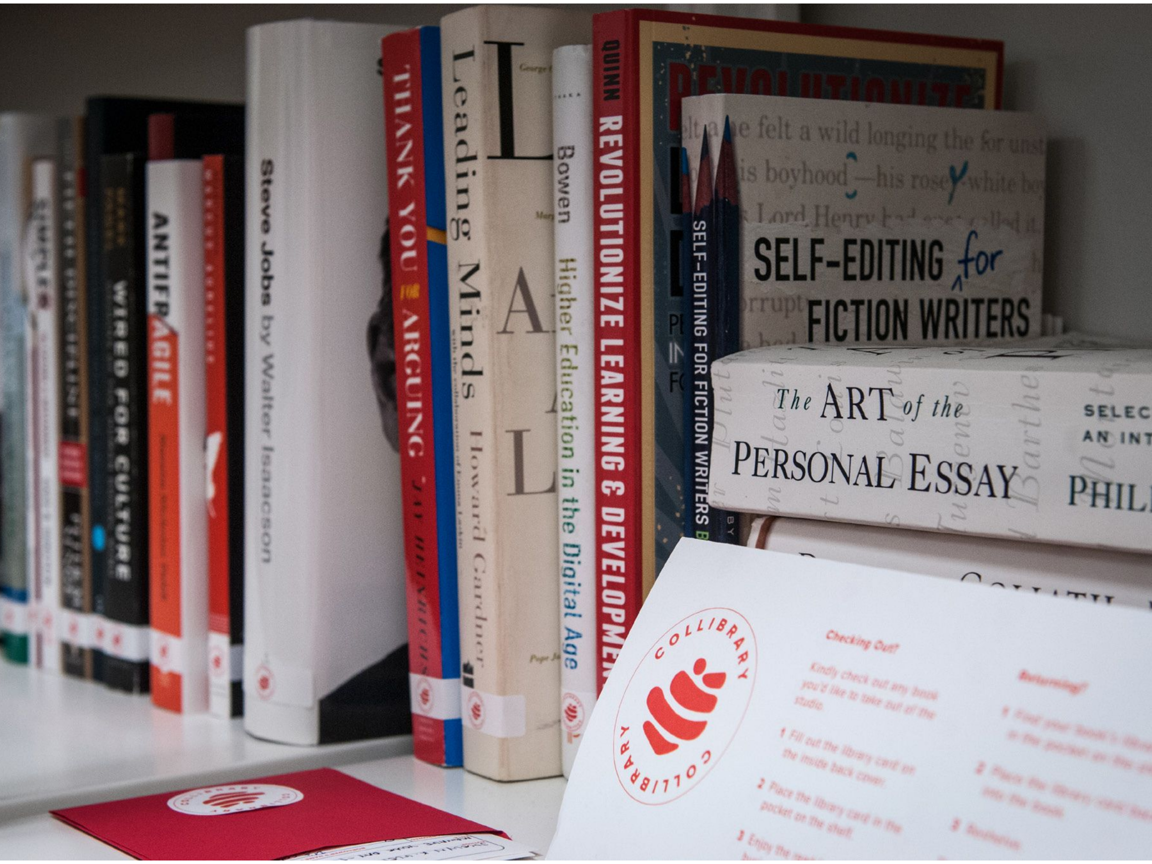
While doing a fellowship recently at the Atlantic Council to examine global trends and their impact on diplomacy, I hosted an event on the future of cities. There, I had the good fortune of getting reacquainted with Amy Storrow after 10 years and, for the first time, met Paul Kruchoski. They are two members of the Collaboratory, a unique initiative within the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at the Department of State. What struck me at that event was Amy and Paul's framing of global, macro-trends in the context of real people and the real world in real ways. In foreign policy, we sometimes tend to view many aspects of our work as a form of problem solving. The Collaboratory takes a different approach based on a systematic focus on perspective: what might seem to be a problem from one vantage point turns out to be an opportunity when viewed from another.

Understanding "perspectives," the combination of our personal experiences and what we've learned from outside sources, is the essence of the Collaboratory's approach. To some that may sound like a universal ad hoc approach. The difference is that the Collaboratory is entirely conscious and purposeful about bringing in the emotions, biases, assumptions, and all things that make us human into the workplace. In many organizations, especially ones that operate within their traditional institutional frameworks (such as the State Department), employees believe they must check the personal parts of themselves at the door. The Collaboratory, on the other hand, believes that these personal attributes are vital in solutions that endure. Put another way, processes that implicitly presume disassociative behavior by participants will result in flawed, incomplete solutions.

When Amy announced "We're writing a book!", I was not surprised—this is what I've come to expect from the Collaboratory. The stories combine the deeply personal with the sometimes philosophical and always theoretical. The belief that sharing and understanding perspectives is the key to creative and ultimately effective solutions comes through. The chapters in this book move from the personal to the universal. But in each case, the voice is unmistakably that of the individual.

As Amy Storrow discusses in the first chapter, it is easy to look past people who are not in our "pod." Her highly personal essay examines how her work as a writer-in-residence in a children's cancer center informed the rest of her career. Her poignant account of how life can be encapsulated in various pods or ecotypes reminds us all that our own friends, colleagues, and family members influence not only our lives but our work, too.

Patricia Joo discusses her experience as an immigrant from Brazil who moves to the United States as a young child, knowing very little English. Her story is about the resilience she developed through the adaptive insight that effective communication encompasses much more than just words. She has come to use this knowledge as she moves through new experiences and even to



The Collibrary

handle that unsettling sense of foreignness that she felt, as many of us have, when transferring from one bureau to another at the State Department.

Jennryn Wetzler starts us off with a moment in Luxor, when she was a student in the Critical Language Scholarship program and was briefly mistaken for a prostitute. Rather than rue the embarrassment, Jennryn extols the meaningfulness within that awkward moment and similar incidents inherent to exchange programs and, more broadly, when things just don't go as planned. She relates her experience in sub-Saharan Africa to her current work and she describes the emotional, sometimes unexpected, changes experienced by exchange program participants.

Sunshine Ison, the incoming Director of the Collaboratory, studied beauty queen pageant culture as a Fulbrighter in Venezuela. Insights on makeup and talent competitions led to a deeper understanding of how even superficial aspects of societies can expose their real essence and break the barriers to true mutual understanding.

Katie Leasor's wry essay tackles her own shifting priorities and the issue of being a contractor at State in the wider context of the history of federal procurement law. She breaks down the some of the different categories of employees working at the State Department and the important role each one plays, correcting some of the biases each of the groups harbors about the others.

Hannah Koenig argues for design in government. Hannah helped my office use design techniques to update our mission, redefine our vision and to consider more clearly our values when we make decisions. When Hannah introduced herself to our team with, "Hi, my name is Hannah, and I like coffee ice cream," we were charmingly disarmed and the atmosphere instantly became more egalitarian and open as other participants shared their chosen flavor or some personal quirk that wasn't relevant to anything except establishing their bona fides as a human being.

Paul Kruchoski connects the role of the orchestra conductor to new ways of thinking about work in which hierarchy comes from expertise rather than power. Leadership isn't about telling others what to do but creating the atmosphere for them to bring their unique experiences, skills, and, of course, perspectives, into harmony and convergence.

It's also no surprise that the Collaboratory came to exist within the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the people-to-people part of the State Department. It has more than 120 exchange programs, including the Fulbright Program and the International Visitor Leadership Program. Approximately 55,000 people

Cello

participate in ECA's exchange programs every year, including about 10,000 Americans. ECA holds an impressive alumni roster: nearly 400 former exchange program participants have served as heads of state; 77 have won the Nobel Prize, and 88 have won the Pulitzer Prize. ECA builds networks through academic, professional, youth, sports, cultural, and private exchanges. The rationale behind these exchanges is that barriers that often divide us, such as politics, language, ethnicity, religion, and geography, break down when people get to know each other beyond stereotypes. Participants also develop new skills, explore ways to create positive change in their communities, and establish the trust needed for a more secure, prosperous, and just world.

Today, just two years after their founding, the Collaboratory is a team of six that has pulled off some incredible things in their quest to design, pilot, and spread new ways to do educational and cultural diplomacy.

For example, they added connective technology components to existing exchange programs to "lengthen the arc of engagement." Virtual pre-departure orientations save resources and time so that more people can participate in exchange programs. Virtual follow-on activities give participants opportunities to have richer experiences and do more with what they've learned. The Collaboratory also researches and then sets parameters for emerging programs such as the use of massive open online courses (MOOCs) in blended learning environments. MOOC camps, held at more than 70 posts each year for approximately 5,000 people, offer ways to test-drive an American education, while giving participants access to a new community of shared interests.

The Collaboratory also examines ways to improve work processes, both within its own shop and at a wider scale, by incorporating human-centered design principles. They use a decentralized approach, as discussed in Paul's essay. This approach allows the Collaboratory to do more than most would ever think possible.

Finally, the Collaboratory is about collaboration: it rarely does anything by itself. Their list of partners is diverse and includes NASA, PBS LearningMedia, the Rhode Island School of Design, as well as many other bureaus in the State Department and other government agencies. These partnerships invigorate their work and bring fresh ideas and new ways of thinking to our institution.

If you ask the Collaboratory for assistance with something, the first thing you can expect is to be asked lots of questions in return. They don't take short cuts. They're also open to risk and want to be sure that everyone learns something new in the process. For me, the Collaboratory serves as a reality check. Their simple questions have sent me many times back to the drawing board to analyze and really think about my true objective. It's saved me countless hours in time and energy from veering down the wrong path.

The inquisitive, open mindset underlying the Collaboratory's work, and the path to it, are replicable. This book is, in essence, seven true stories about coming to that mindset. Mindset matters because it creates opportunities for innovation and efficiency, which drive policy goals forward. Ultimately, this is a book about the creation of a kind of work culture that will better serve government and other institutions in the future.

So why read it? First, it's full of great stories.

Second, for those who think that bureaucracy has strangled opportunity within government, the story of the Collaboratory itself demonstrates that innovation and agility are not only possible and advantageous, but can actually flourish. We could use more Collaboratories in government, so it's worth looking at how this one came to be.

More broadly, the book is an excellent reminder to consider the ways we communicate and organize ourselves and how that process is useful to shaping and implementing foreign policy. As the world moves towards deeper networks and decentralization, new opportunities for engagement and impact will arise. The Collaboratory offers us all a way to work within that space.

Pods and Paracosms

Amy Storrow

For about two years in the late 90s, I lived a life bounded by cancer. I worked as a writer-in-residence at Texas Children's Cancer Center in Houston. It's the largest pediatric cancer center in the United States. It treats 2,000 new patients and 41,000 outpatients each year. Texas Children's has patients from 35 states and 26 countries: a giant factory of misery and fear and hope. Part of what I did there was write stories with kids in the bone marrow transplant unit. In one month, three out of four of my students died.

I think about my students often. Mostly I think about Salvador, who wrote a story based on his name. In the story, Salvador the Saver was a superhero who could magically transform his arm—as a key, say, to unlock a door—in order to rescue his older brothers from absurd predicaments. Shortly after he wrote the story, his arm was amputated. I had assumed that he'd had leukemia, like most of the kids I worked with (seventy-five percent of whom survived), but he had bone cancer. Shortly after that, Salvador died.

I started a newsletter there called *The Splendid Review*, which featured the kids' stories, drawings, a rather spirited advice column, and some wacky horoscopes. It was these particular children and their siblings captured in those moments there on the page. Sometimes it was really funny, and sometimes it was sad. I was counseled by management that it should be more "uplifting" and "inspirational," but the way I saw it, children were not in the business of having cancer to inspire others. I had a clear priority: the children and their families. They had an additional priority: funders.

At the same time, my stepfather Roger participated in a clinical trial down the street at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center after he'd exhausted the standard protocols available to him in Florida. M.D. Anderson is one of the world's largest cancer centers. In 2014, its personnel managed 1,363,008 outpatient clinic visits, treatments, and procedures. Roger had mantle cell lymphoma. He and my mom travelled to Houston every three weeks for his treatment. I never knew quite what awaited me when I walked through the door to his room—they were both unraveling, each in their own way—but I did know that two faces would turn toward me, need and shame and love and anger and fear written all over them.

So during this time I would travel back and forth from one cancer center to another, a distance of about a quarter mile, and at night I had nightmares that I had cancer and there was no one to take care of me. I knew all about how that backache wasn't really a backache, how that tiredness was not just from a bad cold after all, how that seven-year-old's mother at the clinic just couldn't take it and left. The girl had slid into my lap and said, "I'm pretending you're my aunt."

I was living in what I've come to call a podworld. A podworld is a real place, one that can be small or vast, that's created by the experience of the people who share it. Once, as I waited at the airport to pick up my sister, I had a revelation that, actually, not

Suitcase on the Athens Metro

everybody at the airport knew someone in a cancer center.

When I think back on that time now, it's as a sort of norming. It has served as a vaccination against fake emergencies, against priorities that could be questioned a little more deeply. What is really important? How can I listen more clearly? How can I make sure vulnerable voices are heard?

Around this time, I also worked as a writer-in-residence at an inner-city elementary school there in Houston, the kind of place where teachers' cars got stolen out of the parking lot and classroom walls occasionally absorbed stray bullets. Most of the students came from immigrant families, many of them without papers. I loved the kids. I especially loved the third grade mind—it was dreamy and hopeful, not entirely sure yet of what was real.

The students built whole worlds with words. In their stories, they lounged in the backs of limousines the size of aircraft carriers with pony rides and soccer games right there behind super-supersonic engines. I taught Shakespeare and Calvino, and nobody dared to tell me that the students couldn't learn to write a witch's spell or create an invisible city. When the students imagined something, it was theirs, regardless of what their "real life" might be. They made stories they could keep.

In this school, as in many schools, the students had DEAR—Drop Everything and Read. The principal's voice sounded over the intercom, and everyone from the gym teacher to the janitor to the librarian to all 1,000 students stopped what they were doing, picked up their books nearby, and read. Their books swallowed them, and they fell into a collective trance, letting their minds fuse with the stories they'd chosen. When DEAR was over, they emerged, blinking, back into their everyday classroom and their everyday selves.

When I first floated the idea of having DEAR for 90 minutes once a week at ECA's Collaboratory, our team was pretty skeptical. Weren't we "crazy busy," like everyone else? They humored me, though, and we scheduled the first session more than a month out. It took a little while for us to fall into the trance I'd seen at Lantrip Elementary, to see beyond our assumptions about both busyness and productivity. DEAR has a way of reminding us of what's really important.

One of the first contemporary popular essays about busyness is "Bumping into Mr. Ravioli" by Adam Gopnik, first published in *The New Yorker* in 2002. He discusses his almost-three-year-old daughter Olivia's imaginary friend, Charlie Ravioli. Charlie Ravioli is a world-weary seven, far too preoccupied with his New

York sophisticate life to squeeze in time with his best friend, Olivia. On her toy cell phone, she talks mostly to Laurie, the imaginary assistant of the imaginary friend, asking that he please, please call her.

Gopnik consults his sister, a psychologist, and learns that while his daughter's particular situation is "so New York," it's nothing to worry about. He learns that some children, as they get older, create paracosms, invented universes with their own geographies, languages, flora, and fauna. When Charlie Ravioli does not have time for Olivia, she creates "paracosmic tall tales" instead: she wins a chess tournament, saves all the animals in a zoo, drives a taxi and keeps the cash. This is a created world at its simplest and finest: one that provides comfort and control and escape.

Gopnik argues that New York is especially prone to what I call the "busier than thou" syndrome because of its congested nineteenth-century architecture packed with trains and their "love children," subways and commuter trains, all of which support bumping-into-ness, along with a culture of incomplete communication. Emails often end with the promise of a phone call, and a voicemail message often ends with the promise of an email. As a result, most routine communications are, in fact, deferrals. We constantly reschedule our acquaintances as we try to spend more time with the people we love (or working on things we love), but because we spend so much time in the act of deferring itself, we don't have time to do what we care about. Hence the great divide between busyness and productivity.

I used to be an "emerging writer." I was rich in time, if not in money. I'd published in literary magazines, had a piece on NPR, and had been "discovered" by an intimidating big-name agent in New York who was poised to make things happen. The agent had said she'd sell my first novel "in a month"—except she didn't sell it at all. In the end, I'd been emerging for years. I began to take my time richness for granted while I suffered more and more over the lack of cash.

I lived in a wide world inside my head in a tiny house that used to be a one-car garage and still had a water line about a foot off the ground leftover from Tropical Storm Allison. (The line matched the one on most of the furniture inside.) I thought about wearing a bicycle helmet when I drove my car. While it had many fine qualities (it smelled good), it was not really roadworthy.

When I turned 38, I decided that it was time to explore whether the world needed my words or whether I should possibly offer up something else instead. I considered three paths: going to medical school, becoming a Unitarian-Universalist minister, and joining the Foreign Service. The last option was the only one that did not require funds up front, and by the time I was forty, I was standing in the Wood Lobby of the Foreign Service Institute swearing an oath to the Constitution.

The State Department was by far the biggest pod I'd ever joined, and it offered a beguiling number of exotic intra-podworlds. I was hungry to live. I wanted to embrace our planet in all its vastness. Four months later, I drove myself to my first post, Hermosillo, Mexico, where I interviewed about 44,000 non-immigrant visa applicants, visited the 49 American prisoners in our consular district (mostly drug traffickers, but there was also a notable child molester whom the other prisoners tried to electrocute), and served my fellow citizens whose family members had died in Mexico. The hardest was the mother who insisted on visiting her four-year-old son in the morgue. Who was I to refuse?

I wrote "unsolicited Q&As" back to family and friends—the questions as well as the answers. I asked myself if I missed writing. The answer still holds true, I think. I don't miss it as much as I thought. The balance of stories in my head is probably roughly the same—it's just that most of them come from outside of me rather than inside. I'd shifted the tilt of my story scale away from paracosms (and those I helped children create) and towards pods that I could actually inhabit myself. I remember waking up my first morning in Riga after a year of training and thinking, "I live in Latvia. I speak Latvian. How did this happen?"

For two months, a program officer joined the Collaboratory on detail to start a peer-to-peer learning network for the Bureau. She'd learned about us when she saw a blog entry on DEAR. We loved having her with us and were sad when she went back to her office. She said she'd come back for DEAR. Even though I knew her intentions were good, I doubted it would happen. It hasn't.

I had a chance to ask her why. She said that it wasn't always actually about time, it was about allegiances. If she came to DEAR, she worried that she'd be seen as disloyal to the priorities of some of her managers. She was back in the podworld of her office, held in check by its membrane, governed by its assumptions and traditions.

The Department of State has 69,000 employees and 294 embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions worldwide. It has its own language, which includes phrases like "control officer," and "truncated briefing checklist" (tBCL for short, and it's not actually a list), and "CVE"—"countering violent extremism." The Secretary of State, I'll have you know, is simply S. He has two deputies, D and D-MR. (It's not only James Bond who uses the alphabet this way.) Then there's my apartment cooperative, which has 120 apartments, a community herb garden, and a thicket of very colorful neighbors who make pronouncements at quarterly meetings like, "We must hire a Parliamentarian!" And there's OldPod, the nursing home in Connecticut where my dad and stepmother live. I visit OldPod via AmtrakPod, and it always takes me a day or two after returning home to corral my sadness.

My favorite pod right now is a small one, a pod within a pod. It's the Collaboratory itself. There are seven of us right now. Our most deluxe number is the 80 million Twitter impressions we earned for a virtual exchange program with five schools in the U.S. and Latin America in partnership with NASA. We do a lot of making things up as we go along. We also respond to challenges we receive from our supervisors or from each other, which often take us in unexpected directions. This is how we ended up designing and implementing "Connect Camps" in sub-Sarahan Africa, in which participants learn mentoring skills and how to use low-bandwidth technology to connect to each other and build stronger communities. It's how we've ended up in a partnership with The Rhode Island School of Design on a summer institute for design and public policy for those in the federal government, civil society, and the private sector. It's based on the idea of human-centeredness.

When we get stuck on something in the Collaboratory, we "go back to our values." They are transparency, openness, generosity, creativity, and, one that is often unstated but that runs powerfully through our days, compassion. We made a decision early on to focus on serving, in government-speak, "the underserved." We try our best to see beyond fake emergencies: we gave up most of our Blackberries, gov-badges of busyness and all the burnished importance that busyness bestows.

We are all vulnerable voices. And we all need time to create stories, to draw, to write wacky advice columns. We need to find ways to bring our whole selves to work, which is the work of government, by the people and for the people. We need to find ways to be richer in time.

The thing about working in large bureaucracies is that, often, other people aren't entirely real to those who are not in their pod. Bureaucracies have a way of flattening or eclipsing people's realness. Sometimes people are even what the factories produce. The Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau is a factory of exchanges;

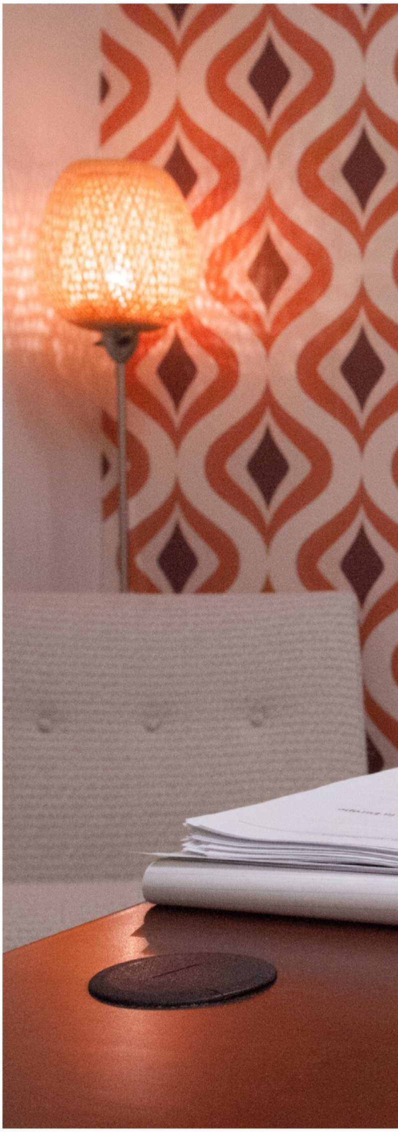
hospitals and nursing homes process ill people. Sometimes the systems come before the human beings.

Roger was lucky to die at home with hospice support. I arrived the next day. My mom wanted to sleep in her own bed but did not want to sleep alone. She looked at me, and I nodded. That night, as she cried, I held her and recited, over and over, Pablo Neruda's "I Will Come Back." "Again," she said as each new ending broke over us. "Again," until she fell asleep.

That night I gave her Neruda's paracosm, one in which the speaker imagines his own future death and invites the reader—"man, woman, or traveler"—to look for him on the shore, "between the stones and the ocean/ in the light storming/in the foam." He says he'll have no voice but will be the movement of the water. "[H]ere I shall be both lost and found—/ here I shall perhaps be both stone and silence."

Roger loved the ocean. We scattered his ashes on Siesta Key in Sarasota, Florida. When I think of that night, I am right back in it, right there.

All podworlds are distorted. Their enclosed nature makes them so. I'd argue that the same is true for paracosms, no matter how fully rendered they are. (They're still smaller than the universe.) What is really important is that we not turn ourselves into two-dimensional characters as we fold ourselves inside them. Pods are co-creations, every last one of them. When we read, we travel in a paracosm. When we travel, we read the landscape of our new podworld. Don't sell yourself short with busyness to fill a hole out of fear or boredom. Be your whole story. If you remember what's really important, you can do so much more.



Desk Portrait: A Study in the North Woods in the Winter

From Immigrant to Pioneer

Patricia Joo

"A bird in search of a cage.

So much freedom, so much choice, so many opportunities to matter.

And yet, our cultural instinct is to find a place to hold us, a spot where we are safe from the responsibility/obligation/opportunity to choose. Because if we choose, then we are responsible, aren't we?"

—Seth Godin

"Hello, I'm Rafael Vargas. Are you Jeff Johnson?"

"Yes, I am. How do you do?"

"I'm glad to meet you, Jeff."

"Welcome to Minnesota, Rafael."

My older sister Barbara and I sat in my father's study and read this dialogue from the *Pathways to English, Book 1* aloud over and over again. The words sounded so foreign and strange to my ears, having been accustomed to hearing only Portuguese and Korean.

My tongue twisted and curled as I struggled to pronounce the letter "r." It seemed so exaggerated, the way I had to roll my tongue back to pronounce, "Rerr-fael."

It was early 1992, and my family was preparing to move from Sao Paulo, Brazil to the United States in a few months. My father, who had taught himself English decades earlier by reading books and *Life* magazines, held English language lessons every night after dinner to prepare us for the big move. Cristina, my oldest sister, received separate lessons from my dad using the *Pathways to English, Book 3.*

My primary school had an English language class, and I also took an after-school course, but aside from a few basic phrases and vocabulary words such as dog, cat, tree, fruit, a few colors, and counting from one to ten, I hadn't learned or retained much. It also didn't help that my dad taught us that all words beginning with "wh" have an "h" sound as in "who," insisting that "what, when, why, white" were pronounced, "huh-what, huh-when, huh-why, huh-white."

I don't recall too many details of what the U.S. consulate looked like. I can only remember eagerly sitting outside the office, waiting for the door to open and to be called for my turn to go inside. My parents had stressed the importance of the green card visa interview. I had no idea, of course, what a green card was, but just that I had to be on my best behavior and only answer the questions that were asked. I also knew that I was going to talk to an American, which was both exciting and intimidating. "But what if I don't know the answer or say the wrong thing?" I asked my mom on the way there. "Don't worry, just be yourself," she said.

I went in with my parents and sat across from a friendly consular officer who was behind a plexiglass window. To my relief, she greeted me warmly in Portuguese. When she asked why I wanted to move to the United States, I replied, “Because I loved our recent family trip to Disney World, and I love snow!”

She smiled and after some conversation asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” My eyes lit up. I had an answer ready because my sisters and I had practiced for it. Barbara wanted to be an artist, and Cristina wanted to become an astronaut. I said with confidence and conviction that I wanted to be either a journalist or a lawyer. I wasn’t expecting a follow-up question, but when the consular officer asked me why, I answered without hesitation, “Because I like to ask a lot of questions, and my family says that I’m really stubborn and like to argue a lot.” That made the consular officer laugh, and I was convinced (and tried to convince my family) afterwards that my charm had secured us our green cards.

I remember my first day of school here in the United States like it was yesterday. It was the end of third grade, and my family had only been in the country for a few weeks. Because I didn’t speak English and it was the last month of the school year, I was placed in the class a year below me.

My teacher, Ms. Ma, showed me to my desk and introduced me to the class. “Hi everyone, this is Patricia. She is from Brazil, a big country in South America,” she said. “Make sure she feels welcomed!” Ms. Ma then handed me a thick English workbook meant for first-grade level learners and returned to her desk at the front of the room. It was filled with pages to practice tracing and printing big letters and to draw lines connecting words and pictures. Even though I already knew how to write well in cursive with a pen, I didn’t mind this elementary exercise. I wanted to blend in and practice doing things exactly as an American would.

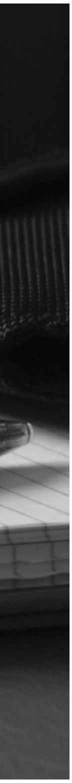
“Hello, I’m Pah-tree-sha,” I introduced myself to my deskmates as I struggled to roll the “r” again and to pronounce my name in English.

Journalist Portrait

"Hi! I'm Michael, and I sit here!" a tall, lanky boy with a bowl cut said as he dropped his Trapper Keeper binder on his desk as if to emphasize where he sat.

Pathways to English was my guide as I replied, "I'm glad to meet you, Michael."

That was pretty much the extent of the sentences that I could string together in English at the time. Although the language barrier posed a significant and obvious challenge, I didn't let it stop me from trying to make friends from the very first day. Like any kid, I just wanted to adapt quickly, and somehow as a child I knew intuitively that I could find other ways to express myself. And what better way to connect with fellow 9-10 year olds than by playing a game together?



In anticipation of my first day of school, I had brought with me a long white elastic band about an inch thick and 10 feet in length with its ends tied together to make a long loop, to play French Skipping, also known as Chinese Jump Rope. I didn't know what it was called in English at the time, nor did I have the words to describe it. I just knew that this was my favorite playground game in Brazil, that I was really good at it, and that I could show others how to play it. I naturally owned my expertise and thought that others would find it fun, too!

When recess began after lunch, I approached a few of my new classmates and held up the elastic band, asking them in my broken English, "Jump elastic?" In Portuguese, the game is called *pular elástico*. They had never played it, so I jumped right in to teach them. I positioned two people facing each other with their feet shoulder-width apart and the elastic band stretched taut around their ankles. Then, with animated miming and gesticulating, I demonstrated how to play the game—the hopping patterns with feet jumping inside and outside the loop, and how the levels increased by moving the height of the elastic band up around the knees, thighs, then waist.

To my relief and satisfaction, they caught on quickly how to play the game, and soon after, other kids wanted to join and began forming a line to try it. The boys also had fun messing with the girls' turns by running in and tangling their feet in the elastic band. Every day that followed, I brought the elastic band for us to *pular elástico* during recess, and pretty soon I was being invited over to my classmates' houses to play after school.

Fast-forward 21 years, and I was preparing to transition as a contractor from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) to a new position in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). I was going to be part of a startup shop, the Collaboratory, in the bureau that promotes educational and cultural exchanges and English language learning!

Never mind the missed opportunity in middle school to build mutual understanding by sharing my Korean cultural heritage and cuisine. The most popular kids in sixth grade came over to my house one day after school, and in their search for something to eat, they opened the pantry to find a two-gallon glass jar filled with hundreds of dried anchovies with the heads still attached. High-pitched screams and pandemonium ensued as my friends ran around the kitchen in fear and disgust, believing they had witnessed a dehydrated guppy massacre. “Ewww!! That’s so gross! Look at all the dead fish! Murderers!” they said. With my social survival at stake, I didn’t dare tell them that the dried fish were a popular Korean snack and side dish. I quickly made up an excuse instead, saying that they were for my older sister’s high school science project.

Although IIP and ECA are sister bureaus in the public diplomacy family, the transition between the two felt akin to my immigrant experience and move to the United States. The new bureau felt like a new country, with its own culture, norms, leadership, language (the alphabet soup of acronyms), and organizational terrain to learn how to navigate. It also felt like I was taking a big risk, leaving the comfort and familiarity of my defined role and team in IIP where I had been for two and a half years, to partake in forming a brand new team in ECA with a more nebulous, still unformed scope. When we launched in November 2013, early descriptions of the Collaboratory ranged from being called an initiative, to a virtual exchange unit, idea lab, incubator, and platform.

But for some reason, the excitement I felt was overshadowed by even more uncertainty and anxiety than I had on that first day of school. The memory of my first few weeks in ECA was marked by

Afghan Gullies

an almost paralyzing fear of failure and of being seen as a fraud. "Fake it 'til I make it," I'd tell myself. "Everyone's faking it. Fake it 'til I make it." This time around, I didn't come with an elastic band in my backpack, ready to win new friends and teach my colleagues how to *pular elástico*. I was, however, fluent in English and equipped with more knowledge, professional skills, and years of relevant experience than ever before. My fears seemed unfounded, yet they nevertheless felt real. Why was I so worried, and where had the fearlessness and confidence that I had as an immigrant child gone?

Turns out that I'm hardly the first to experience this turbulence. The Collaboratory was going through a normal developmental sequence that Dr. Bruce Tuckman outlined in 1965. Tuckman is an American psychologist who researched group dynamics theories and proposed a model of small group development that includes four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing. According to Tuckman, a team will undergo all four phases as it comes together, faces challenges, matures, and achieves high performance. This proposed model follows a natural, observed process in which people orient themselves to one another and test boundaries, manage conflicts, build relationships and cohesion, and balance interdependence with autonomy in order to achieve tasks and deliver optimal results.

During the forming stage, individual roles and responsibilities are unclear, and processes are often undefined. Group members orient themselves by testing and identifying boundaries, and they form dependency relationships with leaders, one another, or pre-existing standards. While some individuals are excited and motivated during this stage, others are anxious over the ambiguity of the path ahead. I found myself in the latter camp. The storming stage is characterized by conflict and friction that can arise as the group works through interpersonal issues, challenges, requirements, and continued uncertainties. The team clarifies its purpose, focuses on its goals, and compromises to find solutions and overcome obstacles. In the norming stage, the group develops cohesion and unity while deepening relationships, trust, commitment, and support. As group norms coalesce, consensus emerges around clear roles and responsibilities. Finally, the group reaches the performing stage, in which roles and structures support a high-functioning, self-regulating unit. Team members perform with a shared vision and high degree of autonomy. Applied on a larger scale, I posit that Tuckman's theory can be seen occurring in larger groups such as organizations, and even in society.

As a "Third Culture Kid," or someone who was raised in cultures outside of my parents' during my development years, I've always been able to adapt and assimilate seamlessly into any new culture, context, or environment. In addition to my multicultural and hyphenated Korean-Brazilian-American identity, I'm also a "1.5 generation" immigrant—that is, I was brought to the United States before my adolescence by my immigrant parents. Cuban-American sociologist Rubén Rumbaut first discussed this term in the 1970s. While I am from both places and exist in many cultures, I do not fully belong in or identify entirely with any of them. This chameleon-like trait, which enables me to acclimate so easily, left me further perplexed by my apprehension in joining the Collaboratory and my initial struggles swimming in its grey, uncharted waters. I wrestled with this question for a long time.

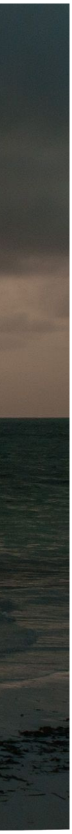
The sudden realization I had reflecting back on it is that the transition to the Collaboratory is the first time that I wasn't an immigrant, but rather, a pioneer. As an immigrant, I was accustomed to diving head-first into well-established groups and spaces already in their norming and performing stages. The United States, my third grade elementary school class, my team in IIP—these were all places that had been formed and established long before my arrival. Yes, a group will go through all four stages again to some degree every time a new member joins it, but all I had to do in order to succeed was to acquaint myself and blend into the existing norms, catch up as quickly as possible, and begin performing as well as or better than others.

In the Collaboratory, however, there were no founding fathers. There were no pre-existing team structures into which I could mold myself; no norms into which I simply had to flex. I was a pioneer, along with three other intrepid teammates, who had to create and build this new entity from scratch with nothing but the compass of our values and the support of each other's backs. And we did. With humility, we formed and stormed. We carved our path and place in a historic bureau, listening to and learning from others, embracing change and the grey of ambiguity, pushing out praise, taking risks,

Indian Ocean

naturalizing new Collab-citizens into our tribe, and iterating very rapidly as we went along.

That's not to say that it was easy, at least not for me. I felt pressured and intimidated by the wonderful opportunity to be creative. I always considered myself a creative person, but I felt weighed by the responsibility to dream up, suggest, and pursue ideas and interests on how to design, pilot, and spread new ways of doing educational and cultural diplomacy. In previous roles, my job function was clear, and I had to perform duties and tasks as assigned within my domain. I had room to grow and autonomy to shape my role, but it was still within the confines of a pre-



existing mold. In contrast, my role in the Collaboratory became to brainstorm and implement new ideas, programs, and approaches beyond self-imposed, perceived, or external boundaries.

Instead of enjoying and exploring this newfound flexibility, however, I felt trapped by a fear of failing, of falling short. I felt like a bird who had been living inside of a comfortable cage and was finally allowed to stretch my wings and take flight. But instead, I became a bird in search of a cage, overwhelmed by the freedom to choose, to lead, to make my mark, to not be just another government contractor. I understand now that finding one's own voice can be even harder than becoming fluent in someone else's language. I'm still learning how to speak, how to assert, how to create.

In 1977, Tuckman and Mary Ann Jensen updated the model of group development and added the fifth stage, adjourning (sometimes referred to as mourning or deforming). It relates to the disbanding of a group following the successful completion of tasks and scaling down of interdependency, often leading to a feeling of loss by the members. As the group's developmental sequence culminates and its collective purpose is attained, individuals can move on to the next endeavor.

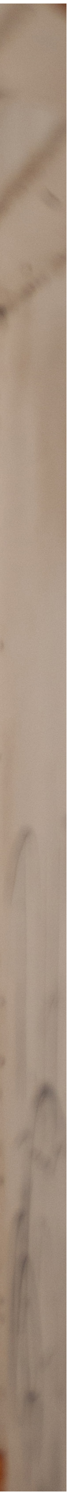
As I write this, two of our founding pioneers are emigrating to their next adventure, and we are preparing to welcome new permanent residents. By no means do I believe this marks the end of our story, but rather, the beginning of our next chapter. Owning our expertise, strengthening our creative confidence, sharing our culture, and spreading our values and process—these remain our work in progress, and we will surely continue cycling through the stages of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.

The Collaboratory's experience is not linear, but emergent. Our network of expatriates and visitors will grow, and we will share in our pioneering and immigrant experiences. I look forward to welcoming our next Collab-citizens with the very first sentences that I learned to speak in English:

"Hello, I'm Patricia Joo. How do you do? I'm glad to meet you. Welcome to the Collaboratory."

Desk Portrait: Patricia's Space

Woman in Red



Honoring Awkward

Jennryn Wetzler

“Get out! Imishi!” I barked, cheeks burning with a sudden adrenaline infusion, surprising both of us. The innkeeper’s eyebrows pulled high, nearly detaching from his forehead.

“I’m sorry, ma’am. So sorry. Sorry, again,” he said, shuffling backwards out the door, bewildered and equally embarrassed. His later apologies included offers of free soda, and a sheep I would presumably raise and eat back home, in Washington, D.C.

The innkeeper had unlocked a hostel room for me, stepped inside, and promptly demanded sex. According to local beliefs my Arabic teacher cited, as an unmarried, western woman traveling solo, I was most likely a sex worker. Why else would my family members and friends not travel with me as protection in public? Presumably, my unescorted presence in the public space could only imply one thing.

As it turns out, I wasn’t a sex worker or even lustily prowling for random strangers around Luxor. I was a rather dusty, worn-out and flustered student on the State Department's Critical Language Scholarship (CLS). It was 2007, and I was stalled in one of Egypt's most historic cities, having just missed my return flight to Cairo. My flight mishap came on the heels of a weekend trip to the Valley of the Kings. The immensity of the stone-carved monuments, timeless offerings to the gods, stole my breath and left a soaring feeling in my stomach. Emerging from the valley I had a parched throat but perma-grin from saturation in art history.

The subsequent five hours I spent at the local airport, ineffectively bargaining with airport attendants and watching fleets of tourists successfully flip-flop onto their planes without me, dropped me back to a less-monumental present. My stomach looped in continuously tighter knots with each new piece of information: no standbys accepted for the next three flights, no flights available for the money I had. I would have to return Monday morning and try again.

Embarrassed by my own absent-mindedness with the flight, and tired of failed haggling, all I wanted was a comfortable place to sleep before returning to the airport the next morning. Knowing I would join my Arabic class late the next day stirred worries of فصحى العصر (Modern Standard Arabic) conjugations, which swirled like eddies in a current through my mind.

Yet, when I missed my flight and lost my travel group, Luxor changed for me. Without my classmates, I suddenly felt vulnerable in the public sphere. Despite the heat, I shielded my limbs with sleeves and skirts—but it didn't matter. I felt the blanket of constant eyes weighing down my steps: sometimes curious and sometimes unsmiling... but ever present. Or, could this be the onset of paranoia?

Over the course of my prolonged stay in the Departures terminal, one airport barista offered me a free latte, with a seemingly pitiful glance. Airport guards began jovially claiming I would not exit the airport until they received kisses.

Once an inspiring city, through which I luxuriously ambled with awe and ease, Luxor morphed into a confusing, foreign labyrinth. Corners where I'd sipped fresh squeezed orange juice, laughing with other students and clicking my camera freely, I now scurried past, avoiding eye contact with juice sellers. I doubled efforts to shield myself, donning a scarf over my head, cloaking myself from collarbones to wrist to ankle, while navigating the shortest possible routes from food to shelter.

The next morning, I made it back to Cairo without a challenge, but I felt muddled.

Until then, my time in Egypt had been carefully crafted. My CLS cohort and I moved like a school of fish, comfortably gliding this way and that, along predetermined routes. We were flown to the airport, shuttled to a hotel, bussed to language classes and sightseeing. We flocked to mosques and markets, and collectively succumbed to hypnotic whirling dervishes. Yet, most of our initial outings included the buffer of English-speaking chaperones. We first stayed in Zamalek, a neighborhood where restaurants and shops catered to western tourists, displaying sandwiches with New York deli prices. I pictured floating captions underneath each interaction in English, rather than Arabic.

This is not to say we had a stifled experience. Quite the opposite. We reveled in the thrill of new sites with new language challenges, and arriving home with blackened feet, covered by the soot of the city. We sailed down the Nile, and danced atop a couple of the roofs lining it.

Often, we'd laugh nervously in the bumper-car taxis. Every ride felt like a high-stakes, rules-free race, and each cab was pockmarked with dents. I remember my toes curling as I braced for impact in one cab ride; the driver decided to floor it up an exit ramp, in reverse, into oncoming traffic. Another cab, while paused on the pedestrian walkway, incited a rap on the hood by an elderly man passing with a cane. The cab lightly rammed him in belligerent response.

The CLS scholarship was an adventure for our group of 30. As we grew more comfortable, the free time broadened. The travel-hungry scheduled multiple weekend trips, while others built confidence in Cairo's street markets, haggling.

The richness of the locale—from the strange harmony of the prayer calls across the city, the patchwork colors of scarves and spices sold at markets, to orange blossom scents—was heady, and enthralling. Our thrills, as well as a grinding five hours of language training each day, connected us. Many of us are still friends today, and two people on the trip are now married with children.

Yet, when I reflect on any degree of cross-cultural awareness I developed in Egypt, everything seemed to pivot with that moment in Luxor. The innkeeper's expectation and genuine confusion stretched my perceptiveness.

I began to feel a more textured, multi-dimensional cultural fabric of everyday life infused with many histories. And I was cognizant that so much of it would always remain outside of my grasp as a western woman touring the country in the public domain but belonging in the private. Rather than the two-dimensional facade of Egypt tourists may get in the public domain, the interactions and experiences starting to cross domains confused me. I saw an ever layering, swirling collision of contexts, cultures and influences. I experienced generous welcomes, kindness and ease in the private spheres. Our language teachers invited us to family meals in neighborhoods removed from snapping cameras and English translations. They shared laughs and hugs amid our language struggles with the guttural "H's" and words spelled vowel-free by locals. We toured the inside of mosques and family houses, reveling in the rich, ornate interiors, shielded from the world. Intricately laid tile work, wood and stone carvings inside always came as a shock to the more stark exteriors—fronts to the outside domain.

Yet, traveling along sidewalks, down alleys and between public destinations, I started feeling out of place without a male or several females from our group to accompany me, like I was caught in a "forgot my pants at work" dream. The independent American identity I brought with me to Egypt would have freely run errands solo in a tank top. While I would don t-shirts and no head coverings, I started viewing the tank topped and mini-skirted tourists posing by pyramids with a cringing sense of discordance—worrying they inadvertently solidified stereotypes in many minds.

I started distancing myself from the other western tourists the way an angsty teen would her family (including abundant eye rolling). This got me rethinking the boundaries we create between our notion of self and any "other"—and how cross cultural exchanges can loosen the cement of identities. I wondered how many millions of other people were finding a confusing fluidity in those boundaries at random moments too. Was it as cheek-blazingly awkward for them?

I now expect that many of us experience these less-than-heroic times during our exchanges abroad that leave us more identity-confused—the embarrassing, frustrating, non-victories where our (or others') least-proud self emerges. Or just the times when the moment of coasting through everything we thought we knew abruptly ends.

Those humbling, very human moments may not be the ones that make the news clips or the shiny reports on study abroad programs. But, often, they give us some of the strongest insights into our own identity and the seemingly foreign cultures into which we hurl ourselves. Expectations about who we are, and distinctions from the "foreigners," or communities in which we find ourselves start to melt.

These experiences are what I always return to when swapping stories with other travelers. Often, they are recounted with an added gloss of nostalgia and a little flourish of storytelling, but always manage to highlight some level of dazzling awkwardness. But the absurd moments, when we are forced to confront our expectations, can be the most telling. Those uncomfortable, bewildering and humbling experiences can either reify or melt the barriers between us and others—which I've come to immensely appreciate, in my current job.

In 2013, I got the chance to work for the State Department in the Bureau that funded the trip that raised my denominator of awareness and cultural sensitivity: the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). I am delighted to work (and play) in ECA's Collaboratory, concentrating on expanding access to open educational resources, with a particular focus on low-bandwidth options for sub-Saharan Africa.

As part of ECA, I started seeing all of the work and thought that poured into programs like mine in Egypt. I saw how program officers deliberately craft the eye-widening windows into other cultures and experiences that ripple through participants' lives. Moments like the one I had in Luxor cannot be planned, but exchange programs set up the best context for the "aha!" moments to occur.

Immersed in the Collaboratory, I sometimes witness the influence these exchanges have on participants. I can watch the programs weave participants together in a new culture encouraging exploration and growth, then return participants back to their origins; understanding some of what the participants are experiencing reunites me with that soaring sense of connectivity.

When focusing on our Collaboratory pilots, I try to remember my Egypt experience as well as other travels. The frustrations of waiting between electricity blackouts and spotty Wi-Fi on one of a few computers with internet were not the glamorous stuff of reports for the Peace Corps, for example. But these frustrations did give me empathy for tenuous internet connections the majority of people face around the world. I now feel blessed by institutional support and tools making pilots for open education in low-bandwidth sub-Saharan communities possible.

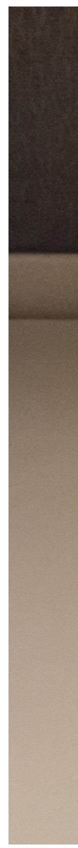
With one pilot, I never expected to see young Somali refugees serving as mentors to our Mandela Washington Fellowship (MWF) alumni, who are providing open educational resources to Masai students in rural Kenya, without access to internet. Seeing photos of school children, each with a tablet in hand, accessing entire digital libraries off-line has been a reminder of the value of that connectivity, even if it comes in spurts rather than a steady stream.

Our Connect Camp pilot allows MWF alumni from all over sub-Saharan Africa to collaborate with each other and members of their communities whom they mentor. The pilot includes a series of workshops, which open space for alumni and their mentees to work with technology for internet connectivity in remote areas and to design models for change in their local communities.

More importantly, the workshops offer an opening for young Africans from 49 sub-Saharan countries to connect and share their stories. Whether stories include frustrations and humbling moments, victories and surprises—the participants all brainstorm ways to support each other. I was able to attend the first Connect Camp in Tanzania. Getting the chance to hear first-hand about challenges each participant was tackling in his or her own community, then watching participants understand each other and support each other was a thrill.

Now, as participants continue to draw their communities together across national boundaries, I'm left wide-eyed with excitement. The possibility that we might all taste that global relatedness through different forms of engagement—that we likely all share feelings of joy, confusion, and triumph at some point in the process—drives me here. While the programs may not incite as much social awkwardness for other participants as I seemed to generate (really, continue to generate, if I'm honest), they support participants' discovery and expression of that same connectedness.

The times I've felt most alive have been when traveling—immersed in the challenges of cross-cultural exchanges. Having a job where I can now help find new ways for others to experience this is incredible. For me, these experiences have shifted my approach to engaging with others through work initiatives in Africa, and for life.



Desk Portrait: Book and Tea

The Things You Learn from Beauty Queens

A. Sunshine Ison

My own journey to the Foreign Service being fairly unconventional, I love making the point that every bit of accumulated experience makes someone a stronger Foreign Service Officer. Every international study experience matters, as does every job—no matter how mundane—and, as I said to a woman who had grown up in the foster care system, so do even those parts of life that might once have thrown up obstacles. Our State Department is made up of former chemists, poets, journalists, lawyers, and musicians, each of whom adds a new and necessary perspective. I've been in the Foreign Service for eleven years now, longer than all other jobs combined, but for some reason that early work experience—the summer I spent as the assistant-to-the-assistant of a bestselling author, my stint as a freelance writer and editor for a custom publishing company, and most of all a handful of years working part-time at a library reference desk—loom disproportionately large. Raised in Appalachia on a family farm, I also come to education and opportunity from a different angle than many, and I am lucky to have a point of entry when working with rural or poor audiences and partners that others might not.

Perhaps the most unexpected ingredient (though not the least useful) in this odd mix is my experience with beauty pageants. Although I eschew any haircut that takes more than five minutes to style, I have long adored watching the Miss Universe pageant, especially the semiotic theater of the absurd that is the national costume contest. In 2000, I landed a Fulbright scholarship to spend ten months in Venezuela examining the country's pageant obsession and success (where *las Misses*, as beauty queens are called locally, have earned Venezuela a spot in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for a number of international crowns).

Self-assurance and a healthy sense of humor were integral survival tools for my year in Venezuela. First of all, as a short and normal girl with a nose-ring, I was surrounded by women who were towering examples of physical perfection. And I quickly became used to being compared to my roommate and fellow Fulbright student, an epidemiologist doing HIV research. He was the Fulbrighter out to save the world, while I was studying a topic that was *obviously* a waste of the U.S. government's money and a stain on Senator Fulbright's good name. I could laugh it off, knowing that my research into *las Misses* let me understand Venezuela in a unique way at a time when Hugo Chávez's rise to power was putting Caracas in international focus. After all, if you scratched the surface of any aspect of Venezuelan life—whether business, gender, race, art, or politics—you'd quickly find a link to the world of pageantry. Chávez's main opponent in the early days of his first presidential campaign had been a six-foot, blond, former Miss Universe who gave her name and angelic appearance to a best-selling Barbie rip-off. In the years that would follow, *las Misses* continued to influence political life, from the oil strike initiated by a ship named after Miss World 1981 to the 2014 murder of former Miss Venezuela Mónica

Farm, West Virginia

Spear, an event that sparked mass protests against the government's inability to curb crime. This history stretched back to the famed *Generación del 28*, the group of youth (many of them future leaders of Venezuela) whose coronation of Beatriz Peña as "Queen of the Students" in February 1928 served as a pretext for the first major demonstrations against dictator Juan Vicente Gómez. In other words, if you want to understand a culture, it doesn't hurt to study the phenomena that matter to its people.

I'm not blind to feminist concerns about beauty contests, but I think that our focus on this aspect above all others has prevented a lot of study into the other interesting questions that pageants can raise—for example, about nationalism, entrepreneurship, spectacle, and the sly ways that international relations happen outside formal diplomacy. As a writer, it doesn't hurt that the Miss Venezuela pageant also has so many good stories, including tales about last-minute twin-sister substitutions, beauty queens who stood up to dictators, and *Misses* who made it OK to talk about breast cancer and autism.

More unexpectedly, my year in Venezuela also offered lessons that have followed me through my career and come in handy on everything from grant review to project management. That's because one of the reasons that la Venezolana wins Miss Universe so often is that the Organización Miss Venezuela (OMV) approaches beauty contests as seriously as a general hatching a battle plan. OMV president Osmel Sousa has assembled an interdisciplinary power team, including José Rafael Briceño, a playwright, professor, and theater director who sprinkles his speech with Umberto Eco quotations and makes the contestants read Oscar Wilde to study the art of the witty remark. For years the OMV's Misses crushed their competition because, while other countries simply gave plane tickets to the pretty girls who had recently won their national pageants, the Venezuelan had spent months of intensive training learning how to be the perfect beauty queen. She could analyze stage lights and adjust her make-up accordingly, gracefully negotiate stairs in an impossibly heavy gown, and toss off seemingly spontaneous clever lines about current events. No one else stood a chance.

One example of the OMV's strategic thinking is the Miss Venezuela height requirement. It's rare for a contestant to be shorter than 5'8", and most winners are 5'10" or taller. The reason? Alphabetical misfortune. "When one of our Misses participates in Miss Universe or Miss World, she'll be, at the very earliest, number 75 in the lineup," explains Osmel Sousa. "Imagine for a moment that you're a judge and you have to watch, one by one, all of the contestants." Adds Briceño, "The Venezuelan has to pull off something spectacular in order for you to put her on your list, because by the time she's arrived, you've already chosen your top fifteen." The idea is that the Venezuelan needs to "wake up" the judges, and one way to do that is for her to be taller than most of the other contestants. Venezuelan judges also look for a contestant with an "unexpected" sort of beauty, not too hard given Venezuela's multiethnic society. Miss Venezuela is just as likely to have a last name like Jonaitis or Ekvall as she is to be named Fernández or Jiménez.

I've noticed that the same basic principal applies when it comes to reading through grants or selecting exchange participants: The unexpected often comes out on top. Osmel Sousa is right: After reviewing dozens of solid, even impressive, applications, a panel will often favor a project or person who brings something new and fresh to the table. Review committees will sometimes be more generous to proposals that are a little rough around the edges or applicants who might need a bit more hand-holding if they stand out from the crowd.

Grants lessons aside, my unusual expertise might have remained just a good conversation-starter had it not been for the Miss Universe Organization's decision to hold the 2008 pageant in Nha Trang, Vietnam. Through pure coincidence, the USNS *Mercy* was also scheduled to visit Nha Trang that summer as part of the Pacific Partnership humanitarian deployment, which would gather an international group of medical experts to provide free treatment for thousands of patients, including children with cleft palates. To complete the circle of serendipity, I had started a tour as Assistant Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City the previous autumn and was assigned to provide press support for the *Mercy*'s visit to Vietnam.

The work done by the U.S. Navy's two hospital ships, the USNS *Mercy* and USNS *Comfort*, is one of the greatest untold stories of our military. Fully outfitted as 1,000-bed hospitals with the latest medical equipment, the *Mercy* and *Comfort* don't just provide medical support to U.S. troops. They also respond to natural disasters, with the *Mercy* serving as a floating hospital in the Indian Ocean after the 2004 tsunami, and the *Comfort* providing medical care after Hurricane Katrina and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. When possible, they conduct international humanitarian missions through programs such as Pacific Partnership, which in 2008 would take the Mercy to Vietnam, the Philippines, and other areas in Southeast Asia to provide free treatment for 91,000 patients. Unfortunately, the program often struggles to get coverage; a military good-news story is sometimes hard to pitch.

With the permission of my supportive and open-minded Public Affairs Officer and Consul General, I reached out to the Defense Attaché in Hanoi to make my case. While most people might think of Miss Universe as a one-night event, in fact the preliminary events stretch out over nearly a month, and the pageant is often eager to highlight its humanitarian and community relations work. Journalists travel from all over the world for Miss Universe, but I knew that it wouldn't necessarily be easy to coax them away from the swimsuit displays to interview military doctors. The Embassy agreed to my proposal, and I contacted the Miss Universe Organization to see if there was any interest in a partnership. A few weeks later, contestants from the U.S.A., Canada, the Philippines, Guam, India, and Australia (which were either Pacific Partnership destinations or had doctors on board) visited the *Mercy* to meet the sailors and medical staff and to play with children undergoing treatment. The Miss Universe Organization sent its official videographer and photographer and included footage during the pageant telecast and in their media outreach. The *Mercy*'s good work made news as far away as India and as close to home as Seattle.

That was my introduction to one of the best parts of Public Diplomacy work, drawing on every ounce of experience, knowledge, and creativity to develop programs that effectively address community and Department needs in new ways and building partnerships to make it all possible. In Sarajevo, we found that Young Adult literature could make inroads in breaking down pernicious ethnic barriers. Through the Embassy's One Bosnia-Herzegovina, One Book (1BiH1Book) program, students in dozens of towns across the country read and discussed the young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and created poems, essays, and cartoons in response. *Absolutely True Diary*, by Native American writer Sherman Alexie, tells the story of Junior, a teenager who makes the difficult decision to attend a high school "off the rez" where the only other Native American is the school's mascot. In addition to the book's candid and depiction of identity issues—as well as trying to fit in at a school where he is in the minority, Junior is also viewed as a traitor by many in his community for leaving the reservation—Alexie writes about poverty, bullying, homophobia, and alcoholism. His sharp humor and light touch keep the story from coming across as heavy-handed. Students responded to the book with unqualified enthusiasm. One teacher told us that the American setting let students broach the subjects of inter-ethnic conflict and tolerance without having to worry that they were "betraying" their own ethnic group. One young man at an American Corner discussion talked with others about the pain of reconciling his homosexuality to his Muslim faith. A teenager's cartoon used a key moment in the book to illustrate her anger that Bosnian adults remained fixated on a war that had ended before she was born. Pairs of schools developed joint projects to bring students and teachers together across ethnic lines, including some projects between nearby communities that had seen little interaction since the war in the 1990s. It was through 1BiH1Book that a high school in Bijeljina, one of the first towns to expel its

Muslim inhabitants in 1992, developed a successful school-visit partnership with a madrasa 40 miles away.

I do my best to make our programs transformational both for the intended audience and our U.S. and local partners. For 1BiH1Book, we enlisted the help of superstar librarian and NPR commentator Nancy Pearl and cartoonist Ellen Forney, whose art was an integral part of *Absolutely True Diary*. Nancy was so moved by what she saw on her trip that she returned home to write and speak about 1BiH1Book and the American Spaces program, while Ellen agreed to draw a special cover for the 1BiH1Book anthology. Best of all, we were also able to bring Andi Running Wolf, a young woman from the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana, to talk with youth about her decision to return to the reservation after college to serve her community as a social worker. It was her first trip overseas, and her frank conversations with students in Bosnia-Herzegovina gave all participants, including Andi, new perspectives on the world.

For me, joining the Collaboratory is about continuing this work, helping other Public Affairs Officers build their own meaningful and exciting programs, as well as figuring how we as a Department can make space for innovation and new ideas. That the Collaboratory was a different kind of animal really hit home during my interviews for the position. Instead of a one-on-one with a senior official, I was interviewed by members of the Collaboratory team. As I prepare to start this new adventure, it means a lot to me to have been selected by the people who will be working for and with me. And our conversations, which leapt from technology and design theory to the lessons of failure and the tyrosine clusters in Parmigiano cheese, gave me a hint of the remarkable range of knowledge and creativity of my future colleagues.

The interviews also made it clear that the Collaboratory is one of the rare places where skepticism is not only tolerated, but welcomed. One great frustration in the field is that technology that works beautifully in Washington doesn't always make sense overseas, where poor connections, low bandwidth, or simply different expectations of technology can stymie a program. We want to make use of the wonderful opportunities that technology can offer, while avoiding a situation in which, for example, a domestic violence activist must be interrupted and asked to start her heartbreaking story once again because a microphone didn't work right the first time.

I think that what I can bring to the Collaboratory table (other than an educated cultural analysis of the best and worst Miss Universe costumes) is a perspective from the field about some of the challenges that Embassies and Consulates are facing as they try to carry out strong public diplomacy programs. What sorts of support do Public Affairs Officers and their sections need to come up with innovative solutions or to work with Washington to develop field-appropriate programs that address policy goals in creative ways? Here are a few initial thoughts:

Innovative programs require passion. There is nothing I love quite so much as sharing best practices. As a public diplomacy nerd, I'm crazy about brainstorming with my fellow practitioners about what makes a project work well or reading cables about another embassy's fabulous program. I've co-opted many great ideas and have been especially grateful to colleagues who have been open about their mistakes so that others could avoid the same pitfalls. I do worry sometimes that it is too easy to fall into the "Why-Don't-You" trap. It is great to hear that Consulate X did Program Y and people loved it, but before demanding that other posts adopt, it's important to carefully assess whether it's truly a good fit for that Embassy and that PD team. Videos go viral because they're made by people who are comfortable making videos (or excited about learning how) and because they match the sense of humor or fun in their host country. 1BiH1Book was a success in part because I was passionate about reading, about the Sherman Alexie book in

Afghan TV Antenna

particular, and about giving youth in Bosnia-Herzegovina a good excuse to talk about things that mattered to them.

Of course, every PD officer is taught to avoid reinventing the wheel, and adapting or adopting a program can be a fantastic solution in many cases, as long as it's still based on the skills and interests of the people actually involved, both implementers and audiences.

Innovative programs require energy. In *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes a state in which, in the course of pushing our skills to the highest level possible, we feel especially fulfilled and alive. It's a familiar feeling for those who are creating innovative programs, but there's one problem. With the rarest of exceptions, our projects are team efforts. Even when our state of flow means we don't mind putting in tons of time and energy ourselves, it's important to remember that we're also going asking others to work extremely hard as well. Take care of your team. If it's your bright idea, make space for others to achieve their own state of flow by building in flexibility that lets others add their own components or put a spin on it that fits their talents. Timelines need to be long enough to allow for unexpected setbacks such as a family emergency or a sudden high-priority project. Finally, exhilaration can give way to exhaustion on a longer-term project, so make sure that you and your team pace yourselves.

Innovative programs require space to grow. One welcome development is that more and more ambassadors are arriving in country with an appreciation for and an excitement about the work of the Public Affairs Section. It's not uncommon for the Front Office to give PAS a general mandate to "be innovative." That's great, but it works best when the section also has a little extra time to play with new ideas and the freedom to take risks. In our hand-over phone call, my predecessor at a former assignment warned me, "Don't get too innovative. You just won't have time." Although my section was able to implement some programs and campaigns that really made us proud, she was right that it meant that we had to squeeze them into an unrelenting workload. As supervisors, we need to make sure that we're making space for our team to innovate. I've counseled the Entry Level Officers under my supervision to include at least one ambitious project in their Work Requirements Statement. It doesn't have to turn out as planned, but putting it into the WRS means that it's less likely to be shoved aside by other duties. We need to ask for space to be innovative when we can, and we must practice what we preach and create that space for the civil servants, FSOs, Locally Employed Staff, and others that we supervise.

Innovative programs require honesty. As diplomats, we get used to seeing in shades of grey and couching what we say in nuanced terms. Because we usually operate in less-than-ideal circumstances, it can sometimes feel like our projects come together only through the sheer force of our willpower and passion. It's true that strong programs don't usually happen without those two components, but as we push the Department to take more risks, we also need to be more honest about failure. A friend of mine who worked for the State Department as an IT contractor once bemoaned our propensity for optimistic vagueness, citing a situation in which his State counterpart chided him for using the word "broken" in describing a problem, even though it was the only appropriate term for the situation at hand. We talk about learning from failure, but often we're reluctant even to say the word. For us to handle risk appropriately—and to ask outside partners to join us on new ventures—we have to be willing to give and accept bad news. I need to constantly remind myself to set aside my enthusiasm long enough to honestly analyze the capacity of myself, my team, and our partners when embarking on a new project. Can I/we/they really do all of this? Or am I just so excited that I'm overlooking warning signs? I've learned the hard way that although enthusiasm can indeed be contagious, wishful thinking doesn't help anyone. Projects with tremendous potential can totter on the brink of failure because we're overly optimistic about the ability of an implementing partner to carry out our vision, or because we haven't taken the time to make sure that that vision is shared by the whole team. I've been extremely lucky that, throughout my career, members of my staff have come to me with warnings, reality checks, and constructive criticism. Their feedback often saved the day.

Of course, this perspective is by its nature incomplete, and I know I have a lot to learn. I've spent four tours overseas, but leading the Collaboratory will be my first assignment in Washington. I'm used to the fairly straightforward task of preparing for work at a Consulate or Embassy. There are months of language training, with one afternoon a week devoted to lectures on the region's politics, geography, economics and culture. If I'm taking on a new responsibility, I'll also have a few weeks of tradecraft training, and the whole thing will close with a round of consultations, a chance to meet with the many program officers, desk officers, and others who will be my liaisons to the Department while I'm abroad. That's only part of it, of course, as it's a steep task to "learn" a new country and culture. For me, that means plundering whole new bookshelves at the library—not only history and politics, but fairytales, novels, and natural history books, anything that can give me insight into how a country thinks and works.

When I accepted the job at the Collaboratory, I initially felt a pang of regret that after a decade of overseas tours, I wouldn't be embarking on that delicious cycle of learning a new country and language. Somewhere along the way, I realized that I was wrong. Working at the Collaboratory offered exactly that opportunity—demanded it, in fact. I may not be parsing out new parts of speech, but I'm certainly learning new vocabularies. Preparing for this job has sent me back to the library to explore whole new regions of the Dewey Decimal System, to learn more about technology, pedagogy, the sociology of social networks, and the power of human-centered design, among so many other fields. I've hit the library armed with a whole new summer reading list and started tentatively filling in the map with the continents of knowledge offered by MOOCs. I'm far from fluent in these new languages, but I have time and, in my colleagues, a set of incredible teachers with backgrounds both very different from my own and filled with confluences. What is the Collaboratory after all, if not a place where we are working together to chart new courses in public diplomacy?

Desk Portrait: Sunshine's Space

Leading as a Contractor

Katie Leasor

I set the heavy car battery charger down next to a bench, taking a seat in the shade on Seventh Avenue. "It's not every day you see a young lady like yourself walking down Seventh Avenue with a car battery charger," a man in a suit said looking at me and smiling. I just stared at him in response as he walked away, thinking that he may indeed be right. Today may not be like every other day, and I just may not be like every other young lady.

I shifted my gaze downward to the blue brochure I had just pulled out of my bag, titled "Careers at State." A bead of sweat trickled down my nose in the late July heat, wetting the pages of requirements and offerings for career trajectories in the Foreign Service and civil service. I sighed loudly as the passersby walked briskly around me. There was no way I thought; absolutely no way I could ever make it to Washington to work for the U.S. Department of State. I read articles about foreign affairs voraciously, devouring the *Economist* and *The Wall Street Journal* on my four-hour commute to and from New Jersey into the city. But I was a terrible history student and hated tests. I always managed to crack under pressure when I had to recall dates and names. I still do.

All I knew was I had to get out of this part-time job at Hertz Rent-a-Car doing "promotional marketing"—which in reality involved handing out fliers and jumping dead car batteries in garages scattered throughout Manhattan. I needed to work at a place where I could serve someone other than myself. That much was for certain. So I applied for graduate school.

I soon found myself standing on American University's campus for my graduate school orientation where I would work the next two years on my Master's in International Media. To be honest, I did not go to school just for the classes, or to bide myself more time from entering the "real world." I went back to school for the people I would meet, worlds I would be introduced to, and the doors in foreign affairs that a university like American would open. I was not sure what that meant or where it would lead, but I trusted in the ambiguity and good reputation of the university, jumping in with both feet.

One of the first people I met when I moved to Washington was my neighbor who lived across the hall from me. His name was Garrett. He was a smart, savvy, very kind and considerate 20-year-old Korean-American undergrad student, who I soon discovered was also a Pickering Fellow. Over a few beers at Chef Geoff's on New Mexico Avenue, Garrett told me about the internships and student programs that a lot of AU students applied to at the State Department. I had read about them briefly online, but he emphasized the academic to professional career pipeline between the School of Foreign Service at American University and the Department's Foreign Service officers.

"People come to AU specifically to get into the Foreign Service at State," he said.

"Well I guess that makes sense since they literally named a school just for Foreign Service," I said with a smile.

I applied for an internship the following day; and I wrote my personal essay about how I wanted a job in public service, believing citizens should have a more active voice in government.

After a month or so of pacing around in endless circles, I finally received an email that I had been offered an internship position in the Public Affairs Bureau at the U.S. Department of State. I was waitlisted, but someone picked before me had deferred their offer. I did not care how I got there—I had a State Department seal in my inbox. I was elated and relieved all at once. Pending my security clearance, I would start in August.

Getting my clearance, badge, and walking along those terrifyingly stark white corridors on my first day was an arduous process filled with a lot of boring Power Points and paperwork. But soon the time came that I was looking forward to and had heard about—taking the oath as a federal employee. In front of the American flag, we all stood and took an oath to, "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same…" I felt an immense amount of pride standing in front of that red, white, and blue flag with my hand against my heart, but also an equal amount of duty and responsibility to the American people for how their tax dollars were spent. Even though at 22 years old I was walking into the Department as an unpaid intern where I knew I was the lowest on the totem pole and I assumed I would do nothing but push paper, that moment made it all worth it. I just needed to remember why I was there, and figure out how to get things done.

I found that navigating the halls and offices of the Harry S. Truman building was confusing and so were all the acronyms spouted out at meetings, but the people working within those walls and at those meetings were not. Everyone I met was helpful, courteous, and would take time out of their day to tell me whatever they knew. I started asking more questions and, soon, I was getting to know my way around the complex and enormous building. After six months of working in Public Affairs (PA), they wanted me to stay for another six months and I was enrolled in the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). This was like an internship except I would finally be getting paid! I continued to work in PA, but all the while was asking around about other positions within the Department. I wanted to put what I learned in graduate school about how to use information technologies to better enable democratic processes to good use.

It was at this point that my friend Anna told me about a Public Affairs position that had opened up in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). I admired the programs ECA managed and believed in building mutual understanding between disparate individuals and communities around the world as a powerful force to promoting peace. This is also known as public diplomacy (PD). I was interviewed by the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at the time, a man who was a former Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain (gulp!) and took the leap, transitioning over to ECA the following month.

While working in the Public Affairs and Strategic Communications office, I began to flourish for the first time in my career. I created communications strategies covering cross-cutting issues for the whole Department that introduced me to all different kinds of people—program participants, ambassadors, Foreign Service officers, civil servants, and contractors. All of them had a variety of expertise across a multitude of disciplines. I learned the integrated processes for telling their stories and promoting our programs, and found I really enjoyed coming into work every day. There was only one problem: I was set to graduate in the next two months and my student status would soon cease to exist. On top of that, the government was changing the structure of hiring from their student programs.

For the first time in decades, the government launched a new set of programs to improve the recruiting and hiring of college students and recent graduates. Unfortunately this meant that the old student programs had to go. The STEP program I was taking part in, along with the Summer Clerical and the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) were rolled into the "Pathways Program." And by rolled into, I mean rolled over. Pathways now consists of three programs: an internship, Recent Graduates Program, and Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF); none of which I was taking part in.

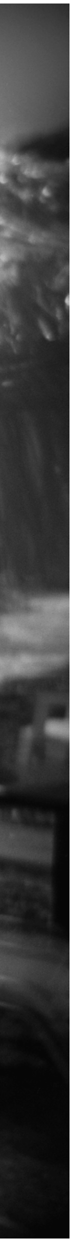
I remember it was my 25th birthday in June 2012 when my former boss told me that my promised SCEP program (which is paid, provides insurance, and after 640 hours of working you are given a federal full time employment offer) would cease to exist. I was devastated. Just when my career was kicking off and I thought I was in the right place with a clear end goal in my sights, my path had hit another roadblock for onboarding as a federal employee. This is something in my family we call the unfathomable Leasor Luck. It's like the day when my brother and sister-in-law were married and Hurricane Irene decided to show up for their nuptials.

After meeting with ECA's Human Resources division I was presented with two options: either enroll in another type of academic program after I had just received my Master's the month before; or submit my resume to a bunch of contracting companies that would put together a proposal to bid for my position. "You mean I would have to pay another $2,000 to take one course at some college after I just paid to receive my second degree last month?" I said. The HR lady nodded yes.

I immediately opted for the contracting role, not knowing much about the process that I was getting myself into. In fact, I had no

Wind

idea. I don't want you to believe that I was so naive, dear reader, to have absolutely no idea what was happening, but no one told me



what to expect or what happened after I gave my resume to my boss to "get the contracting process started." She was then supposed to put together a whole package for my position that contracting companies could bid on. I was aware, however, that I would continue to be paid to work in a public affairs position that fit my educational background on programs I believed in and with people I looked up to.

As soon as my resume was sent out, I started getting phone calls from random contracting companies trying to sell themselves and their companies.

"Our company is DTXtech and we offer 10 federal holidays and 14 personal days," the company's contracting person stated.

"Um, okay, that sounds great, but I have no idea what you are calling about," I said.

"You are going to become a government contractor, right?" the voice said.

"Yes but I'm still not sure what exactly you are talking about," I replied.

Subsequently after being wooed by other contracting companies where I had similar conversations, eventually one of them won the bid.

Though I was still a little lost in this hiring process and what being a contractor meant for me, I was ecstatic at my future career prospects. After six years of higher education, three summers of unpaid internships, two jobs getting paid little more than minimum wage and a few student programs with stipends—I was finally gainfully employed. I was thrilled that I could pay the rent doing a job that I love!

I was also honored to be working in a position where I would have a voice and seat advocating for how American tax dollars were spent. My family was, too. When I told my 91-year-old grandfather from Elizabethtown, Kentucky about the new job working as a contractor for the federal government, he was thrilled. "You just tell them up there in Washington not to be wasting our money," he said slowly in his Southern drawl. "Try and make some sense of it all." I promised him I would try my best.

Now that I was a contractor, I still had to figure out how I could be some type of leader in government, keeping that promise to use my voice to promote the programs I believed in. I wanted to advocate for what I thought would positively progress our country's public diplomacy work. The first step in figuring out how to do that was by filling a void in knowledge about how the contracting world functioned, and eventually, what that meant in terms of how I fit in the big picture of working for the U.S. federal government. I had heard of Blackwater and defense contractors out in McLean on the news, but was not quite sure about how that process played out in public diplomacy or what some people refer to as "soft power." So I began to wonder what my role would be in ECA, and how I could serve the public's best interest as a private contractor. Would it be vastly different from what I experienced before?

This confusion namely stemmed from the fact that my job as a contractor was very much the same (almost identical in fact) to my role as a student employee. There were no major differences in my day-to-day work, other than where my paycheck was coming from and rules prohibiting me from doing "inherently government work." I craved answering the question of what my duty was working as an American citizen for a private company with a client in public service. I wanted to know how I could adequately assist moving the needle forward to make our government more accountable, transparent, and innovative. I needed to unravel the structural puzzle pieces for employment at State, as well as my place in the cycle of government contracting writ large.

I did what you naturally do when trying to figure it all out: start from the beginning. In this case, I soon found out, the foundation of government contracting started at our government's inception. I began to look up the history of government contracting and procurement itself—and let me tell you, it's a very long history. So long in fact that the idea of federal government procurement travelled all the way over to our country from England and has been irretrievably interwoven into the national fabric of our identity.

According to Sandy Keeny of NOAA, during the commencement of America, the English colonists brought with them English common law. Consequently they also carried with them the English system of military procurement that our founding founders used during the Revolutionary War to supply the troops. The early Continental Congress found inherent value within their Constitutional power to make purchases through the private industry in order to establish armies, build roads, and supply militias with munitions.

Congress began to contract some goods and services to the private industry that formed arsenals producing the supplies needed by soldiers throughout the thirteen colonies. Not only was it easier to have those distribution channels for weapons being used in the war spread out across the country, but the business owners and private industry practitioners also specialized in their respective fields. According to Keeny's historical analysis, these private business owners were required to manufacture the best products for the best price. Soon after the government structure started to really solidify, contracting procedures and regulations formalized. Though they continued to evolve over time, the groundwork for those regulations was created by our first Secretary of Treasury, Robert Morris, and they are still in place today. In modern terms, the system he established recognized that the bidders must be responsible and must present the best value to the government by offering the best combination of price and payment terms. It was built for accountability, competition, and continuous innovation.

"Wait, wait, wait, I know this," I thought. "This is why that company won the bid! They fit these criteria and that's why they acquired my contract. I get it!" Well not entirely. I figured out while continuing to read that it was a little more complicated. These complications stemmed from the fact that government contracting to private industry has always been fraught with issues of waste, fraud, and abuse from both the contractors and government employees. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "there is no kind of dishonesty into which otherwise good people more easily and frequently fall than that of defrauding the government."

To avoid the issue of nepotism that began to run rampant when founding members of Congress started appropriating funds to directly benefit their families' and associates' businesses and establishments, a maze of government regulation began to grow. The oldest procurement regulation still around today was passed by Congress in 1808 as the "Officials Not to Benefit" statute, which prohibited members of Congress from benefiting directly or indirectly from a government contract. Over time, the statute was brought forward into the Federal Acquisition Regulation, which became the main system that governs the federal government's purchasing procedures to ensure that they are standard, consistent, and conducted in a fair and impartial manner. That was why all of the different contracting companies were calling me, I recognized, that's why they were bidding!

After reading about the history of government contracting, some issues came to light about my new role inside this ginormous and complex system. History has presented the role of government contracting and procurement as cyclical. The country faces a big emergency such as war, or a major task such as environmental regulations, and the federal system recognizes that there is a gap in the federal government's knowledge, products, or processes to commit to that task. As such, it is the role of private industry based on their expertise to step up and fill that need. For example, did you know that many of the Apollo program personnel, which sent the first man to the moon in 1969, were government contractors? To realize the goal of putting a man on the moon under President John F. Kennedy, NASA's leaders made an early decision that they would have to rely on outside researchers and technicians to complete Apollo. According to NASA's historical records, the number of contractor employees working on the program increased by a factor of 10, from 36,500 in 1960 to 376,700 in 1965. Private industry, research institutions, and universities provided the majority of personnel working on Apollo. This illustrates not only how government spending is—even if sometimes unintended—a huge driver of our economic, industrial, social, and scientific development; but also how the government relies on private industry to fuel America's innovation and growth.

Despite my initial intent to become a civil servant the moment I browsed over that blue brochure in New York City, this kind of information made me excited and honored to work for a government contracting company. They obviously served a very specific function, one that was intrinsically tied to benefiting and feeding our democratic, capitalist ecosystem and country writ large. Even though there are obvious examples of corruption and nepotism that still exist today—contractors serve a very specific function. So the rational question became how my role as a government contractor would affect my everyday work and interactions with colleagues. How could I lead in government and advocate for the programs I believed in while working as a private citizen among four different types of employees at State? Do contractors and civil servants feel the same about serving our country when they show up to work at 2200 C Street, or are there intrinsic differences? The answer to those questions were not abundantly clear when I started as a contractor; but I definitely experienced differences in social interactions after becoming a government contractor and speaking to a colleague who was a civil servant about my new transition.

“Wait, YOU are a contractor?” she questioned.

“Um, yes, yes, I am,” I said, noting her eyes looking at me up and down, fixated on the mint green stripe on my ID badge indicating that I was, indeed, a contractor.

“Oh I had no idea,” she said. “I mean, it just did not seem like you were a contractor since you have been here for so long.”

“Is that a bad thing?” I wondered out loud.

“Of course not, I just never would have guessed,” she replied.

This was the first time I really felt the social stigma of what it meant to be a contractor here at State. Even though I was doing essentially the same job and was in a similar position, there was obviously a difference with how people treated contractors. It seemed that little mint green stripe on my badge had branded me “the other” in some way. The dynamics of our relationship had shifted from a basis on equality, to one focused on our differences because I was getting paid by a private company to be there.

It did not seem like she was intentionally making a slight, but her opinion on contractors came from the basis on her role as a civil servant—and as someone who was not an “at will” employee, or could not easily be fired. In fact, government contracting and procurement was built and intended for contractors to work in their respective government agencies for a limited amount of time on particular projects. The private contracting companies have the money, flexibility, and responsiveness to train their employees adequately to do a specific job, and subsequently, the federal government and country would benefit. This is what happened with the Apollo mission. These contractors sometimes then float from contract to contract bringing their expertise to those agencies that need it—or learn new skills to remain informed for their next job.

Because of the federal deficit and an attempt to cut costs, the current administration wants to bring contracting jobs that are “inherently governmental” in nature in-house and to put them on the federal payroll. As a contractor, surprisingly, I do not agree with

Three Goats, Kashgar, China

this type of "insourcing" or the use of government personnel to perform all the functions that contractors previously performed on behalf of federal agencies. If what contractors do is really inherently governmental, then by law they should be federal employees to begin with, and not contractors. I have to be honest and tell you that I have not always felt that way. It has been fairly recent that I have vacillated from wanting to be a federal employee so bad and feeling that I've earned a full time employment slot (FTE), to my current perspective. By creating a clear channel of contractors straight into federal employment, our government that once relied on private industry to fuel America's innovation and growth would stagnate—and maybe the talent of the employees doing those jobs, as well. Though there are numerous benefits to being a federal employee, including stability and security, I believe when each of the individual, unique types of employees in the Department come and work together, they can be a truly powerful force. Foreign Service officers, political appointees, civil servants, and my fellow contractors all specifically serve a role of balancing out the Department's objectives and representation.

First, Foreign Service officers obviously serve our country overseas, representing the American people at the Embassies and Consulates around the world to secure our interests in other countries. Political appointees symbolize another kind of influence at the Department. They are here to voice the concerns and interests of the political representatives that have been elected by the American people. They move the Department's strategic direction based on what the country's citizens want and need. Civil servants are here for the Department's overall sustainability, they are the institutional brain and continuity when the FSOs and political appointees change over the years—they are the foundational structure and gravity to all the transitory movement around them. Lastly, there are the government contractors like me. Contractors, as previously mentioned, are here in the Department for emergencies or specific major tasks—like trying to get to the moon—and to bring private sector expertise into the Department.

In my case working as a contractor, after my job in Public Affairs and Strategic Communications, I was specifically hired to work on virtual exchanges and assist with setting up the Collaboratory. To me, this was an incredible opportunity to take on a very specific task and help lead ECA's innovative capacity into the 21st Century. I knew taking the leap to that new contract was one of the most pivotal moments in my career. The Collaboratory would inevitably make a mark in the Department and Bureau's history by using modern technologies to connect people together. We would provide the technical capability for the Bureau to maintain new connections and relationships between participants, NGOs, and those involved in the international education space. The Collaboratory was also a chance for contractors to take the expertise they had acquired about producing web chats from the private sector and put it to good use. The technical training we acquired as contractors was pivotal to this role. What I did not anticipate were the new ideas beyond the realm of virtual exchanges that the Collaboratory continues to work on today. From the design of new programs to the proliferation and spreading of those new ideas throughout the Department, it has truly been an unbelievable team to be part of!

This month (June 2015) I decided to leave my job at the State Department and ECA for a corporate job at IBM in New York City. I am leaving satisfied that I served my purpose leading as a contractor in government, and that I kept the promise I made to my grandfather. See, to me, the highest honor of working at State was the experience I gained as a private contractor and American citizen with the government as my client. It was not the promise of a civil servant position and all the benefits that accrued if I stayed here long enough. Nor was it the access to knowledge on how to pass the Foreign Service exam. It was the ability to learn and lead with the expertise I'd gained from the private sector.

After a few years, I found that little mint green stripe on my badge was not anything to be ashamed of. Rather it was a nod to the American flag I took an oath to and a symbol for me to remember who I was there to represent and why—my country.

The Design Necessity

Hannah Koenig

"The problems of Government are complex, and their solutions depend on diverse resources. As a way of applying interdisciplinary insights to the lives and work of human beings, design is necessary to Government. The effective design of public services is indeed an essential public service in itself. And that is the design necessity."

—Ivan Chermayeff

I first learned of the famous corporate identity designers of the 1950s and 60s in an auditorium seat upholstered in purple velour. Of course, I was already familiar with their work, as many Americans are: classic logos for companies like Mobil, PBS, ABC, CBS, IBM, and UPS, many of which are still in use. As slides flicked by during the course of the lecture, the images wove together to tell a narrative about American industry in the post-war period, where businesses were entering markets around the world and needed to identify themselves more strongly than ever. Modern, prolific designers like Paul Rand, Ivan Chermayeff, Herbert Matter, and Tom Geismar distinguished American companies and products from their competitors, and in the process created timeless examples of good design that are still recognized today. I filled my beat-up, partially spineless sketchbook with notes between pages dedicated to drawings and measurements for prints and other projects. I kept a list of reference books I hoped to own someday, including a beautifully designed volume of logos created by Chermayeff and Geismar's design firm.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I recently came across a lesser-known work by Ivan Chermayeff in a context far removed from auditoriums and printmaking studios. *The Design Necessity* was not a logo project for a company or museum, but it was about identity: what if federal government was known for effective design? And what if effective design encompassed disciplines like visual communications and architecture, the landscape environment, and industrial design—but also included public services themselves?

I discovered *The Design Necessity* through a committed champion of design serving at the National Endowment of the Arts. Accompanied by an exhibit and a short film, the book investigated effective design in government by compiling federal case studies of design that performed well in service to human needs. Chermayeff's client was the first Federal Design Assembly, an initiative called to order by President Nixon that convened federal and state officials with design specialists from across sectors with the goal of improving design standards across government. The book project, funded by the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities under a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts, was meant

Packard Door Handle

to help the Assembly promote effective design and give public sector employees examples of well-designed federal projects. It was published in 1973.

The main argument of the book is made in list form in the introduction:

1. There are sound, proven criteria to be applied in judging design effectiveness.
2. Design is an urgent requirement, not a cosmetic addition.
3. Design can save money.
4. Design can save time.
5. Design enhances communication between people.
6. Design simplifies use, simplifies manufacture, simplifies maintenance.
7. The design necessity is recognizably present in projects ranging in scale and complexity from a postage stamp to a national highway system.
8. The absence of design is a hazardous kind of design. Not to design is to suffer the costly consequences of design by default.
9. On any given project, designers and Government officials are committed to the same basic goal: performance.
10. Effective design of public services is itself an essential public service.

In the course of a presentation that included many laughs, my colleague at the National Endowment of the Arts expressed his surprise in realizing that much of his argument for the benefits and importance of integrating effective design into federal government had already been made for him years ago. Despite his sense of humor, and his pleasure in not having to duplicate work, there was an underlying frustration that there are still so many to convince. I too was struck by a sense of resonance between the argument for the design necessity and my nascent experience working at the intersection of design and public policy. The last few points in particular, beginning with the seventh, articulate truths of my time and efforts that I endeavor to explore further in what follows.

7. The design necessity is recognizably present in projects ranging in scale and complexity from a postage stamp to a national highway system.

In 2011, almost four decades after the publication of *The Design Necessity*, I began my career in federal government as an intrepid intern with aspirations of designing banknotes for a living. This meant getting my foot in the door and through security at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, where U.S. paper currency and security documents are produced. Incidentally, the Bureau printed U.S. postage stamps for over a century until stamp production went fully private in 2005.

I spent my first summer in D.C. at the Mutilated Currency Division, the destination for paper currency that has been damaged in some way. Currency that arrives at this office is examined with the goal of reimbursing the customer with a check. I had the chance to spend a little time examining mutilated currency in the course of my duties. I studied burned fragments of bills, detangled dog-chewed denominations, and put together puzzles of shredded currency to deduce exactly how many once-intact five-dollar or twenty-dollar or one-hundred-dollar bills had been sent in a particular envelope. The fingertips of my blue rubber gloves would invariably start to stick together while I wielded my glue pen and tried to coerce pieces of Franklin's portrait to lie flat on the page.

As I learned about the physical makeup of U.S. paper currency by reconstructing its damaged components, I took advantage of my surroundings and politely harassed press operators, engravers, plate production specialists, and designers. On the production floor, I would shout out questions over the noise of the presses—some of which are about the size of a commuter bus—and inhale the particular oily smell that is intaglio ink. Many of my colleagues enjoyed sharing their knowledge. I would happily hear a history of plate engraving techniques, for example, as we explored a room and a narrative full of specialized equipment.

My fascination with currency as an object and product was eclipsed by a fascination with the banknote design process during my second summer at the Office of Engraving. In the United States, there are hundreds—if not thousands—of people involved in producing paper currency. And yet, there are only a handful of designers. Banknote designers at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing undergo a seven-year apprenticeship, during which time they learn about the process of designing and producing banknotes from start to finish: this includes proprietary software, engraving and printing techniques, plate production, the intra- and interagency process of design approval, and testing and quality control of new and existing iterations of various denominations. Most American banknote designers remain at the Bureau until they retire.

My timing was unfortunate, as the two-person wave of open apprentice designer positions had recently been filled, and the journeymen were at least a decade away from retirement. I set my sights on the private sector of the banknote industry, intending to pivot away from the Bureau in light of the constraints involved with pursuing a career path in such a niche field. I left the Bureau with two important insights about the banknote industry.

The first was that context is crucial: the banknote industry, with its intense focus on security and eluding counterfeiters, is deliberately opaque and notoriously conservative. Gaining entry, even tangentially, and experiencing life on the inside is the only way to gain the contextual knowledge and awareness necessary in order to survive and contribute.

The second was that my mindset had shifted from viewing banknotes as stand-alone objects to understanding how they fit into a larger, complex system. This shift from thinking about things to understanding the processes that produce them gave me a nuanced sense and appreciation for design constraints at the systems level. It also underscored the human facet of the banknote production process. Despite its mechanical and bureaucratic nature—the Bureau's website is www.moneyfactory.gov—each piece of the puzzle had been designed, intentionally or not, by people.

As it turns out, these same insights—the importance of context and a systems mindset—hold true elsewhere. I've spent the past year at the Collaboratory, a mighty office of six (and growing) housed in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at the U.S. Department of State. ECA runs over 120 international exchange programs between Americans and foreign citizens with the goal of increasing mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries in support of peaceful relations. At the Collaboratory, we design, pilot, and spread new ways of doing educational and cultural diplomacy—like bringing design methods and mindsets to our work. So far, my time here has reinforced the importance of context and developing comfort with complex systems and processes.

8. The absence of design is a hazardous kind of design. Not to design is to suffer the costly consequences of design by default.

While I was at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, a new design for the $100 denomination was undergoing extensive testing. I learned that it was part of the first suite of U.S. currency that had been designed with special consideration for, among many other stakeholders, individuals who are blind or visually impaired. This was not the result of comprehensive user research or concern about accessibility features, but rather legal action: in 2008, the American Council for the Blind won a lawsuit against the Treasury Department in order to produce more accessible banknotes for those without full visual acuity. In the interests of legal compliance, as well as other factors, the new $100 and others in the series include new features designed for accessibility, such as the big 100 on the reverse of the bill. The Bureau also designed and developed a smartphone app called EyeNote, which scans currency and reports its denomination.

I'm tempted to note here, perhaps tangentially, that many countries have elegant design solutions for security and accessibility features-in-one. Euros, for example, increase in physical size with each denomination (5, 10, 20, 50, 100) and also alternate between a warm and a cool color scheme. With a working understanding of this system, one can determine the denomination of the bill in question by comparing its size and overall color palette. I should also say that in its defense, U.S. currency is among the most heavily traded and handled in the world, and there are many constraints involved in its production that range from the law to the sheer volume of bills required—scheduling print production of the yearly currency order to the U.S. Federal Reserve is a design challenge in itself.

In any event, after leaving the Bureau and before joining the Collaboratory, I kept coming across other thorny, systems-level design challenges like accessibility that spanned the public sector and beyond. I was not alone: the ones I found most interesting, like healthcare and immigration reform, voting in elections, or energy security, were at the top of the news cycles and top of mind for many Americans and people in other countries around the world.

Consider a popular example: the Affordable Care Act became law in 2010 with the goal of putting Americans in charge of their healthcare through extensive health insurance reforms. A key component of the law was that by 2014, all Americans would have access to affordable, higher-quality health insurance through an online Marketplace. The Marketplace would allow individuals and small businesses to compare competitive options and enroll in a plan with confidence.

Enter HealthCare.gov. Much has been written about the launch of the online Marketplace, including criticism from designers bemoaning the lack of inclusion and foresight in the decision-making process that resulted in a relatively untested product going live for a high-profile, politically contentious flop. The experience seemed to be business as usual for the federal government. Those of this opinion included individuals like my aunt, who was open to the experience and excited to compare plans and enroll in one, before interacting with the site discouraged her completely. I learned of her trial with HealthCare.gov as I was sharing about my work with design in government at the Collaboratory. Her reference point for design in government was a service that had been poorly designed.

And yet, the HealthCare.gov experience has also been described as having a silver lining: in a 2014 article for *Wired*, Clark Valberg argued that it was precisely this frustrating failure that got many Americans to care about design by awakening their "design consciousness" and changing expectations about the public's relationship to products and services they consume. Others, like design consultant Harold Hambrose, pointed out that this kind of failure happens all the time in the private sector, comparing wasted tax dollars to wasted shareholder investments in companies that don't deliver—the difference being that expectations about software delivery to the American public are much less forgiving. Still more, including *Wired* contributor Steven Levy, wrote about the re-launch of HealthCare.gov and the intentional design considerations involved with a sense of renewed optimism.

All of these HealthCare.gov narratives reinforce the importance of effective design of public services, whether online (as so many increasingly are) or not. With so many lives impacted by experiences involving public services—from our workplaces to our schools to our health—it is imperative that we are intentional about our design choices. As the authors of *The Design Necessity* argue, design by default is costly, and we can't afford it.

9. On any given project, designers and Government officials are committed to the same basic goal: performance.

At the Collaboratory, we're doing our best to learn from HealthCare.gov and other examples like it. Our colleagues across government are working on a number of important design challenges, from improving access to free and reduced school lunches in public schools to tackling USAJobs.gov, the portal for those looking to join the ranks of public servants. We're working on new ways to approach training and professional development in our diplomatic corps; improving digital standards, including better digital access for those living with disabilities, across government; and approaching processes like hiring or service delivery with an agile, user-centered focus that sits creatively within federal constraints.

At the Collaboratory, we also explore ways that our coworkers can get involved and learn. This happens through conversations, workshops, meetings, and projects. As a team, we enrolled in a MOOC on human-centered design to boost our design capacity and see what it would be like to approach our work in a new way. As it turns out, it was really hard. It took more time than we expected and it was exhausting to push ourselves to think beyond our assumptions about what we knew and how things worked. Each of us excelled at places where others struggled. Some of us were in our element as we practiced different modes of design research, like empathy interviews or in-context observation. Others in our team were most comfortable coming up with dozens of divergent ideas, and still others naturally saw patterns in our data and found it easy to think convergently—to synthesize data, narrow down to a small number of ideas, and make decisions. These discoveries about ourselves extended to our project and our workplace, and we delighted in the accumulation of data, insights, and opportunities.

We gained design experience and creative confidence as we worked, and our final prototype reflected the input of our coworkers and the creative thinking that we invested in the process.

In the course of our travels, we've shared our experience of the course with many inside and outside of government, some of whom have enrolled themselves. Our colleagues in our bureau are no longer surprised when they get an email out of the blue or when we interrupt their lunch to ask for some feedback on a prototype or project. The other day, someone asked me what kinds of things we've got cooking in the Collaboratory, and if there was anything they could get involved with.

Through conversations with my colleagues about what it feels like to try out design methods in the course of a workshop, I hear some common threads. They share their appreciation for taking a step back to understand context and a variety of perspectives before coming up with a solution (*It's important to go through the steps and not just jump to conclusions* and *we need to set aside time to think outside of the box*). I hear about how it feels to reconnect with creativity in the workplace and what it means to be and feel included in a problem-solving process: it feels inspiring, and it means that your contributions are valued and the time spent making them was worth your while (*I'm more creative than I thought*). I also hear about vulnerability in trying something new and the importance of positive feedback and building on the ideas of others (*Positive feedback feels good*).

Attitudes surrounding criticism and feedback in organizations and individuals are important to understand in order to make progress with a new approach. Getting input from others is a cornerstone of design practice, and yet it can be difficult to do well. On many occasions I've participated in or heard stories of brainstorming meetings that discouraged contributions by exploring the many ways an idea wouldn't work instead of focusing on elements that might be successful.

Project Work

This isn't to say that design mindsets and methods encourage warm feelings at the expense of viable ideas, but that feedback isn't critical for the sake of criticizing. The way that we approach design at the Collaboratory is as an invitation—to participate, to be introspective, and to analyze the existing components of something in order to build a better something together. We believe that design methods can empower ourselves and our colleagues to do our work better by taking advantage of insights gleaned from human work

and behavior. We're on the same team: we all have the same goal of better performance for our programs and policy processes.

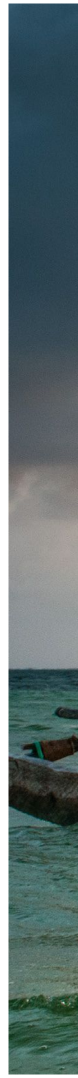
10. Effective design of public services is itself an essential public service.

The idea that public service also means designing public services to be as useful as possible to people has been around for a while, as indicated by *The Design Necessity*. So far, I've found that it is beginning to enjoy increasing momentum in today's federal community. From my vantage point here at State, it is exciting to see efforts underway to build design capacity in federal government by hiring more designers of all stripes, including visual and systems designers.

In fact, visual design and the U.S. federal government have a long history—it was the Works Progress Administration of the 1930s, as well as the trans-Atlantic migration of European designers, that introduced America to the look, feel, and principles of modern design. Graphic designers and design historians like Richard Hollis point out that the WPA commissioned posters from American designers like Lester Beall. His iconic work for the Rural Electrification Administration contributed to an American aesthetic that brought government work to life. Beall went on to join the ranks of Chermayeff and Rand as an identity designer in the postwar era for companies like Caterpillar Tractor.

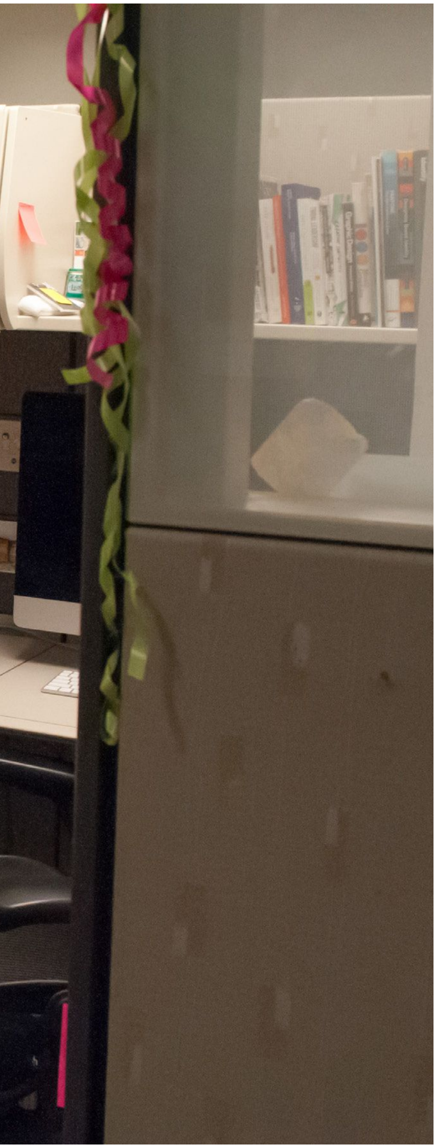
And yet, commissions and grants and the like are not always able to fully address the effective design of public services. Everything I have learned so far points to the fact that context and a systems mindset are crucial. This means that effectiveness is tied to access to and understanding of the public policy process from the inside—which isn't to say that this kind of work is easy. It's certainly less difficult to complain from the beach chair than to get up and wade into the ocean. And yet, holding space for design mindsets and methods in government could happen in many different ways, like designating full-time positions with thoughtful statements of work for creative skillsets, and finding the right people to fill and shape them. Or starting a meeting with an improv exercise and some rules for brainstorming. Or even asking for feedback from someone who will interact with the thing you're working on.

Connecting design and civic participation in the minds of public servants and professional designers can result in a wildly successful partnership of ideas, opportunities, and action. Imagine if we took Tim Brown and Roger Martin's ideas about viewing legislation as a prototype to be iterated upon and ran with it, or if HealthCare.gov was tested repeatedly and iterated upon with feedback from users, with a successful launch as a milestone in its journey. We're trying to boost design capacity and awaken the "design consciousness" of federal government by building these communities of practice in government and connecting them to existing ones in other sectors. Importantly, the Collaboratory is not alone: we've come across many of them in the course of our travels, and learn about more every week. It's exciting to see the possibilities ahead, and to consider the next evolution of the Collaboratory that will take us that much closer to a world where governments better serve their people by embracing openness and creativity.



Canoe from Zanzibar

Desk Portrait: Tea Packets



Breathing Together

Paul Kruchoski

Years ago, I studied cello performance at the College-Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati. On a day like many others, I was sitting in the cello section of our orchestra, rehearsing *The Marriage of Figaro* with a student conductor. The cellos and violas were consistently entering a beat early. Three, four, five times we tried. Every entrance was resounding. Booming. Cacophonous. And a beat early. The conductor tried cueing us later but to no avail. Frustration mounted. In theory, this should be easy—we all knew where the entrance should be. Many of us had played the overture a dozen times. We all had years of musical training. What was so hard about coming in on the right beat?

After ten minutes, the conducting professor, Mark Gibson, came up and tried his hand at the passage. A quick cue, and the cellos and violas came in beautifully, seamlessly, right on time. The student steps on, and we're back off a beat. Gibson smiles, and says: "it's all in the breath." The student was breathing early, anticipating the entrance. Subconsciously, we all read that as a cue for our entrance, and in we crashed, a beat early. A seemingly invisible and inadvertent cue had mysteriously driven the behavior of a group of twenty otherwise talented, capable and skilled musicians. A small change to that cue made all the difference. And once I knew what I was looking for, my entire perspective changed.

This wasn't the only moment of orchestral insight. During a rehearsal of Schumann's Fourth Symphony, our entire orchestra was a mess. The final movement is written like a train with no brakes rolling down a gentle hill. It begins slow and labored, gradually building speed while the passengers grow increasingly alarmed. Our rendition seemed to channel the alarm without the gradual buildup. The horns were coming in two bars early. The violins were accelerating wildly. No matter how strong the conductor's beat, the raucous noise seems to get worse each time. Maestro Gibson takes the podium and surprises me again.

He sits on a stool with his hands in his lap. He makes eye contact and inhales. The orchestra begins on cue. He looks at the woodwinds and cues them with his eyebrows, arching them at the right moment. He leans forward, and the strings swell. He shrinks on his stool, and an almost tender woodwind begins. Literally without lifting a finger, the conductor had restored order. The student conductor had tried to control the orchestra with larger, more forceful movements. The movements had gotten large enough that no one could follow them exactly. Gibson's small, controlled eyebrows were just enough: neither too large nor too forced. I never looked at eyebrows the same way again.

As they happened, both of these moments seemed, to me, like black magic. Upon reflection, they revealed something unique about the conductor's craft. As the leader of an orchestra, many of their tools are invisible, implicit, and work to subconsciously shape the orchestra's behavior. Their body language conveys huge amounts of information to the orchestra: the timbre, the tempo, the volume,

Chateau Chenonceau Reflection

and the energy that the conductor seeks. And small, unintentional miscues can throw the dynamic, often without the conductor or the orchestra realizing what happened. This idea always captivated me as a musician. The act of music-making isn't merely reproducing the notes on the page; it relies on musicians synching up based on these subtle signals. And the conductor's art is a strange one: beyond just directing, they help make everyone more aware, more attuned to these signals.

As magical and timeless as the role of conductor seems, it is a relatively recent musical innovation. The typical Renaissance group was the consort, a group of musicians who freely swapped instruments, trading their portative organ for a viola da gamba between pieces. Scores usually didn't bother to designate which instrument should play which part: individual members of the consort were usually left to pick an instrument with the right musical range. Consorts were also largely self-driven. In rehearsals, any member who saw an issue could interrupt and suggest and discuss a resolution with the group.

By the time of J.S. Bach in the early 1700s, the origins of the modern string orchestra started to take form. The horns, sackbutts, and viols transitioned to the early violins, violas, cellos, and keyboard instruments. J.S. Bach, Vivaldi, and their contemporaries often wrote a new work (or revised an old one) for the weekly church service. Writing a new setting of the Mass within a week didn't leave much time for the musicians to rehearse. Nor was the music complicated enough to warrant days or weeks of rehearsal. These early orchestras were usually led from the keyboard: a harpsichordist or organist would play the figured bass line (effectively controlling the tempo) and provide cues as necessary. Baroque orchestras and musical ensembles still missed an essential feature of today's orchestra: regular rehearsals. A few composer-conductors would beat time: either standing or from the bench. Famously, Jean-Baptiste Lully beat time with a long pole for his orchestra in France. Until, of course, he brought the rod down on his foot, which became infected with gangrene. (He died of the condition shortly thereafter.)

As music entered the early 1800s, it became significantly more complex. An orchestra working with Ludwig van Beethoven might rehearse two or three times before performing. Still, the prevailing norm was that the concertmaster—the first chair violinist—would direct the ensemble. Only in the early 1800s did orchestras start to feature a modern, standing conductor. As composers wrote longer, more complex works at the end of the 19th century, conductors became a necessity and a permanent fixture. Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* calls for 90 instruments: a huge number at the time. It also features dozens of tempo changes over its five movements; many of which are sudden, surprising changes. The score calls for a wide emotional range, moving from "Reveries" to "a Witches' Sabbath." Gradually, with the growing complexity of scores, the idea of a conductor finally stuck.

And, naturally, these complex works were where I found some of my most profound experiences with conductors. My best conductors conjured vivid images of the conductor's thought process, and invited us into that vision. Even now, I can almost feel the chilly air of Russia and smell the smoke when I hear Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Russian Easter Overture*, thanks to an old conductor's image of Orthodox Mass juxtaposed against pagan rites of spring. These experiences only increased my desire to eventually become a conductor. I reached out to some of the most talented and interesting conductors I knew. I wanted to understand how they viewed their own profession, hoping to glean some of their wisdom for my own practice. One viewed success as "getting myself off the podium." For her, success was an orchestra that didn't need a conductor: one that could engage in its own acts of eyebrow wiggling. Another former conductor of mine thoroughly denied that he set the tempo in particularly tricky section of a Mahler

Northern Lights, Tromso, Norway

symphony: "the low strings drive the tempo—not me. I'm just along for the ride, at that point."

This presented me with a conceptual challenge. My conductors' professed goal seemed like absentee leadership—their ideal state was not leading an ensemble at all. Our conducting faculty were quick to correct me: it wasn't a lack of leadership they valued. Instead, the ideal state was an orchestra that no longer needed the conductor. Many other musicians share this ideal, as well.

In the mid-20th century, orchestras started to buck the trend of having a conductor. In 1951, the musicians of the (conductor-led) Czechoslovak Radio Symphony Orchestra founded their own conductorless ensemble: the Prague Chamber Orchestra, which continues to perform today. The musicians saw it as an opportunity to explore more unusual or atypical works that interested them but might not fare well in the standard orchestra. Interestingly, they occasionally collaborate with conductors on special projects. The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, founded in 1972, is probably the most famous. Based in New York, the ensemble takes a unique approach: the entire ensemble collaborates to interpret the score. The principals, or lead musicians in each section, rotate throughout the year. Listening is a fundamental principle of their work. In 2001, the Executive Director wrote a book on the Orpheus approach to musical leadership: Leadership Ensemble: Lessons in Collaborative Management from the World's Only Conductorless Orchestra.

A few months after the conducting-with-eyebrows incident, I asked a member of our string faculty how he viewed the orchestra. Over his decades as a cellist, he performed and mastered numerous chamber works, intended for smaller ensembles. His response was telling: "An orchestra is like a string quartet, only bigger. Left to your own devices, you would sort out the cues, the bowings, and who drives a tempo change. An orchestra is really a living breathing organism." For him, the challenge was clear: how you capture the intimacy and flow of a quartet when you have eighty or ninety people.

The core premise of his statement is that musical leadership is emergent. Regardless of the size of the ensemble, the direction of the piece is dependent on the influence, input, and interactions between every musician. As my early experiences of a conductor's black magic demonstrate, much of this rests below the surface in the subtle cues and body language of the conductor and the musicians: small gestures, breaths, and even a few eyebrows. The secondary lesson can be drawn from Orpheus's long-running success without a conductor. Musical leadership isn't the act of one—it is the collaborative act of many.

Even in an orchestra, a conductor only makes a small number of the total artistic decisions that make up the composition of a performance. To take one example, bowings are typically set by the string sections themselves. For the last three centuries, orchestras have asked every string musician to move their bow in the same direction on the same note, creating the beautiful rising and falling of little white-and-brown lines on the stage of an orchestra hall. There is a practical purpose: the sound of a down bow (moving your arm away from your body) and an up bow (moving your arm toward your body) are slightly different, and uniformity of tone matters.

The rub, of course, is that not everyone agrees. Each section's principal usually works out the bowing with their members: first violin, second violin, viola, cello, and bass. And that part isn't hard. After a few months of playing together, a section usually evolves a preferred style: we'll start all those bombastic crashes down bow, and we'll divide those melodic passages into a single bow per measure. Not everyone will get everything they want, but it is usually close enough. Much more difficult is resolving the cello/bass bowings with violins and violas. The physics are just different: bows don't move the same when an instrument is in front of you and when it is under your chin. Every orchestra I've played in is plagued by small-scale conflicts over bowings between cellists and violinists.

Yet concert after concert, the bows all move in perfect tandem.

After music school, I transitioned to working in an office culture, where the understanding of leadership and organization was a stark contrast. The orchestra operated like an organism creating a unified whole, with the entire group sensing, resolving conflicts, and compensating to keep the ensemble balanced. The office culture was mechanical, even in our use of language. "We drive results," just like a car or a train. Daily work in an office was similar. Our office would have a set goal, which would be turned into a set of smaller and smaller tasks. A manager would assign each of these tasks to individual staff. The whole thing felt like clockwork. And indeed, many of the origins of modern office culture are built on that analogy.

Just like the modern conductor and orchestra, the origins of contemporary office culture date back centuries to the late 1600s. During the Age of Enlightenment, Robert Hooke, Isaac Newton, Gottfried Leibniz, Christopher Huygens, and many others were laying the foundation for how we would understand our world—including our organizations—for centuries to follow. For these thinkers, the universe was impeccably ordered, with all things operating based on consistent rules. While this is mostly true, their theories about what created this order occasionally veered far off course.

Hooke and his contemporaries were obsessed with clocks and watches. They had good reasons for their interest: understanding and being able to precisely measure time was crucial to their scientific endeavors. How could Isaac Newton define the power of gravity without being able to measure time? All the horological devices presented a huge problem: consistency. Sundials and other timekeeping devices were horribly inconsistent: the sun's arc through the sky is inconsistent, different between each place and each day. Huygens, Hooke, and others devised alternatives: pendulums, springs, and gears that create consistent, periodic

Guell Park Bench

movements that could move the hands of a clock. Over years of work, these scientists devised better and better tools.

Robert Hooke was tremendously influential in the development of time and mechanics. Hooke designed the helical gear and automatic gear cutting machines, in part to further his work on clocks and other complex machines. Yet Hooke was also a biologist and was one of the first men to seriously examine life under the newly-invented microscope. His folio *Micrographia* was the first to use the word "cell" to describe the structure of living creatures. In *Micrographia*, Hooke also brought together two of his passions: mechanics and biology. For Hooke and many of his contemporaries, the microscope provided hints at their greatest hope. The laws governing their clockworks and nature were fundamentally the same. All life grew and evolved in predictable, consistent ways. Just how much longer would it be before we discovered the underlying tick of life? Hooke wasn't alone. The third and final element of Isaac Newton's landmark *Principia Mathematica* was titled "De mundi systemate"—on the system of the world. The title shows one of the deep yearnings of the Enlightenment thinkers: a desire to find the mechanical ticks that drive the clockwork of the universe. They sincerely believed in the idea of universe as a machine. The discovery of the universe-machine never came, but the Enlightenment's underlying belief in the clockwork of the universe has remained.

At the turn of the 20th century, the early sociologist Max Weber carried the clockwork analogy into the realm of human interaction. Max Weber wrote at a time of great and tremendous societal change. The Industrial Revolution was rapidly transforming the German society in which he lived. The country he was born in, Prussia, would no longer exist even a decade later. How could a society stay together amidst all this turmoil? And how could a government hope to govern? If mechanical processes govern life, perhaps they could govern our businesses and institutions, too, he reasoned. His solution to these problems was the Bureaucratic model. Weber's model of bureaucracy came with three operating principles:

- A rigid division of labor is established which clearly identifies the regular tasks and duties of the particular bureaucratic system.
- There are firmly established chains of command, and the duties and capacity to coerce others to comply is described by regulation.
- Regular and continuous execution of the assigned duties is undertaken by hiring people with particular qualifications which are certified.

Weber's model provided the foundation of the modern State. It also influenced a host of management philosophies, just as the modern corporation emerged. Weber and his contemporaries designed a machine, but it is a machine comprised of people and tasks rather than gears and springs. And in many ways, this system worked. His proposal that recruitment should be merit-based radically changed the prospects for social mobility and made organizations more effective. His conception that authority is impersonal, remaining with the office rather than the officeholder, substantially increased the longevity of many institutions. Many of these ideas have become parts of our daily lives. We expect order, rule-based systems in our schools, workplaces, and institutions. We even talk about successful organizations as operating "like clockwork."

The problem is that clockwork-organizations are reaching their limits. In the late 1800s, Weber and his contemporaries were struggling with industrialization, the rise of nationalism and the nation-state, and the emergence of a strong working class and middle class in central Europe. Today, we are wrestling with the transition to a knowledge-based economy, the development of new economic and communication platforms, and the emergence of a globally-networked civil society. We are also dealing with complex, global challenges: climate change, urbanization, violent extremism, and many others. In May 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry made the point eloquently: "We've gone from an era where power lived in hierarchies to an era where power lives in networks—and now we're wrestling with the fact that those hierarchies are unsettled by the new power."

These new networks look and behave more like an orchestra than they do like a traditional organization. Like an orchestra, these networks behave more like organisms than machines. Individual actors are continuously adapting. Groups and individuals within networks often come with competing goals and tactics that they need to discuss and synchronize, just like string players working out bowings. Clockwork isn't the only metaphor we can use for organizing ourselves. The emergent organism metaphor may be just the right one for working in the networked age.

Long-time RAND analyst David Ronfeldt forecasts that the future of governance is more collaborative, more networked, and more organic. He suggests that private actors, civil society, and the government will increasingly collaborate to address societal challenges. Each partner comes with its own resources and expertise and likely lacks the tools to address the issue on its own. When combined, they can, though coordination, conflict resolution, and decisions about leadership often complicate the process. Naturally, this question of leadership comes up time and time again.

Leading in this environment is difficult. Power is diffuse, shared among many partners. Motivations and operating constraints vary tremendously. The traditional tools of leadership do not always prepare us well for leading in this networked era.

Yet we know a leadership style that does. Many of the traits that make a conductor successful work here, too. First and foremost, conductors make it easier—and a firm conductor is a place one can turn to resolve conflicting interpretation. Second, conductors don't merely direct the ensemble. They add their experience and rich knowledge of a score. And unlike instrumentalists, they are solely dedicated to resolving problems around the interactions. Good conductors, like Maestro Gibson, use their powers to remove moments of uncertainty. In short, they focus on getting the orchestra to listen to each other and to breathe together. Networked leadership takes the same skills: adding deep experience, bringing an outside perspective, resolving conflicts, and creating smooth paths for interactions between members of your network.

Over the last year and a half, I have been exploring these possibilities with my colleagues in the Collaboratory in the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. In that time, we have seen this approach work, and we have seen it fail. When it succeeds, our roles hearken back to that of the conductors and musicians I interviewed.

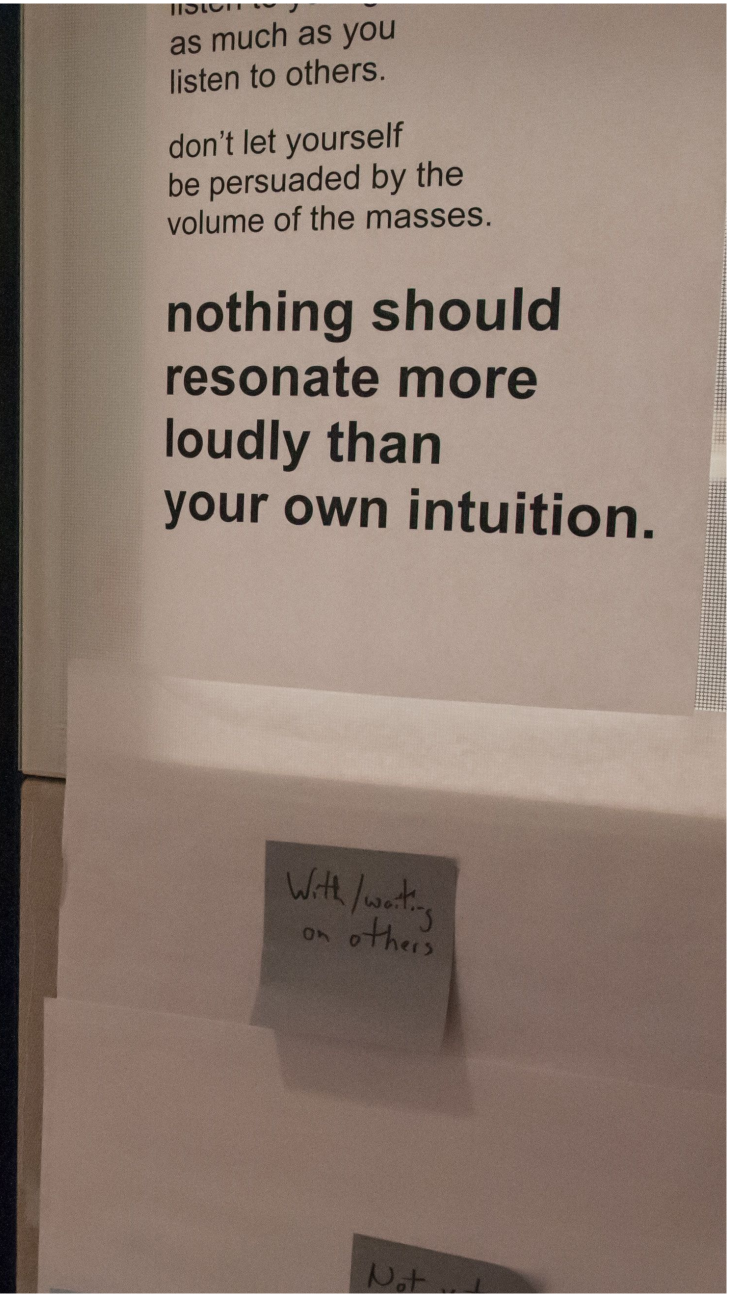
One of my first projects was MOOC Camp, a program in which we create in-person, facilitated discussion groups. The groups meet regularly to discuss and explore the content covered by existing free, online courses. MOOC Camps are now run, for free, by over 70 of our Embassies and reach over 6,000 learners in a typical year. The model relies on existing resources and platforms to bring the costs of each new MOOC Camp close to zero. More importantly, it enables each host or facilitator to determine the right content, find interested participants, and build an immersive experience—all without our team's direct intervention. Each MOOC Camp is autonomous and locally managed: our office provides support by answering questions from our embassies and by providing documentation on best practices. We have no direct costs for the program, aside from the time it took to develop the program and answer the 20 or so emails each week.

As a whole, MOOC Camps are an ensemble that needs only minimal conducting, so we have largely gotten off the podium. The musicians of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra would feel right at home. Getting off the podium wasn't an easy choice to make at the time, yet doing so has allowed MOOC Camps to flourish.

Over a century ago, Weber's model of bureaucracy was largely aimed at solving the problems of governing in a changing time. And Weber's definition of bureaucracy from the 1920s is still one of the most widely used today. Today, we need to develop the same sort of models to deal with governance in our changing time. Nowhere else could new organizational forms make such a substantial difference in human quality of life.

The Collaboratory is the string quartet: a small ensemble. The greater challenge ahead is the symphony. Already, the conductors' rich and nuanced understanding of how our small interactions affect one another and the direction is more valuable than I had ever thought. Now as we experiment with deeper changes and more profound possibilities, I think we all have something to learn from the men and women who lead from their eyebrows. While I may not be playing Mahler, learning to breathe together is still just as important.

Desk Portrait: Resonance


as much as you
listen to others.
don't let yourself
be persuaded by the
volume of the masses.
nothing should
resonate more
loudly than
your own intuition.
With/waiting
on others

Collaboratory

The Collaboratory designs, pilots and spreads new approaches to educational and cultural diplomacy. We explore new developments and technologies, forge partnerships, and link public diplomacy practitioners with experts from other sectors. Through this work, the Collaboratory plays a role in ensuring that public diplomacy adapts to the demands of a changing world. We are housed in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

A. Sunshine Ison

Sunshine channels the talents of the Collaboratory team to explore new approaches to Public Diplomacy with partners within State and across the world. A Kentuckian, Sunshine comes to the Collaboratory after tours in Mexico, Vietnam, and the Balkans, and is excited about helping underserved communities and individuals unlock their potential.

Patricia Joo

Patricia designs solutions to integrate tech-enabled components to exchange programs. She is passionate about applied positive psychology to promote personal and mutual well-being. Patricia is originally from Brazil and a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. She enjoys puns, deep dive conversations, and sand sculpture contests.

Hannah Koenig

Hannah explores how design can positively impact public diplomacy and public policy. One of her goals is to make government more visual. She contributes to the Collaboratory's visual and process design initiatives. Hannah plays ice hockey, makes post cards, and collects banknotes.

Evan Ryan

As Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Evan Ryan is a champion for international exchange programs. She previously served at the White House, where she worked for Vice President Joe Biden and First Lady Hillary Clinton. Coming to the State Department was like landing on another planet, but in true exchange style, she has assimilated to local language and customs. She enjoys meeting participants and showing the world the best the U.S. has to offer.

Roxanne Cabral

Roxanne is a Foreign Service officer who has previously served in Ukraine, Mexico City, Albania, and China. She has a B.A. from Vanderbilt University and a Master of Public Health degree from johns Hopkins University. She is part of a tandem couple, which means her spouse is also in the Foreign Service, and they have three school-age boys—including twins. She comes to work to relax.

Paul Kruchoski

Paul is the Collaboratory's infrastructuralist and policy advisor. He makes sure the team has the resources and advice they need to bring new ideas and programs to life. He also contributes to the team's work on education technology, MOOCs, system design, and strategic planning.

Katie Leasor

Katie served at the State Department for three years in positions at ECA and Public Affairs navigating the world of acronyms. She is a believer in technology for social good, effective storytelling to bring programs to life, and cross-sector partnerships to make a collective social impact. An NJ shore native, she knows good pizza and bagels when she tastes them.

Amy Storrow

Amy is a Foreign Service officer who has previously served in Hermosillo, Mexico; Skopje, Macedonia; and Riga, Latvia. Amy likes to design board games in her head while riding on the bus. She studied English and philosophy at Georgetown and has two master's degrees in creative writing.

Jennryn Wetzler

Jennryn is fascinated by cross-cultural communication and opening access to educational resources. A returned Peace Corps Niger volunteer, Jennryn focuses on new opportunities for low-bandwidth education and exchange in sub-Saharan Africa. Please ask her about openly licensed educational resources, workshop facilitation, refugee education, figure drawing and yoga.

Brian Neely

Brian lives for a better world—believing the lyrics to "Imagine" are everything one needs to know about how to treat other people. That sense of togetherness and a thirsty curiosity informs his Collaboratory work. He enjoys coffee, running, and Lord of the Rings (either format).

Sara Trettin

Sara is dedicated to expanding the open education ecosystem so that all learners have access to the tools, information, and expertise they need to be successful. She enjoys making salsa, digging in her backyard, and packing a tent when she travels. A true Collaborista at heart, Sara continues to employ human-centered approaches in her work in the Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education.

Colophon

Coming to the Collaboratory: Seven True Stories from the State Department

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Minion Pro
Proxima Nova

Published by
Collaboratory
2200 C Street NW
Washington, D.C.

Bureau of
Educational and
Cultural Affairs

U.S. Department
of State

The Collaboratory explores new approaches to public diplomacy and governance that enable human potential, promote mutual well-being, and include new voices in service to a more just, peaceful world.

"For those who think that bureaucracy has strangled opportunity within government, the story of the Collaboratory itself demonstrates that innovation and agility are not only possible and advantageous, but can actually flourish."

—Roxanne Cabral

Collaboratory

Washington, D.C.
2016